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IN YOUR STAFFS' SHOES

Another golf season is underway and I hope spring has treated you well. No matter what the season, I encourage you to step back and evaluate yourself on how you're leading your staff. We've been taught that leadership, business and communication skills are invaluable to today's assistant superintendents. So, how do you stack up?

In the past I've gotten caught up with putting my career goals ahead of building relationships with co-workers. It's been obvious to co-workers and has hurt our relationships. Leaders who put other goals or priorities above building and maintaining relationships lose trust and credibility. True leaders inspire those who follow them. John Maxwell is my favorite author on leadership, and he often says, "A leader without followers is simply going for a walk."

One of my favorite articles on leadership, authored by David Sirota, Louis A. Mischkind and Michael Irwin Meltzer, focuses on three things employees want in their jobs: accomplishment, camaraderie and equity. Employees want to be proud of their work and who they work for. They want to have solid, productive relationships with those they work with. Finally, employees want to be treated fairly when it comes to compensation and benefits. Do any of these priorities surprise you? It seems like common sense, yet most of the times I've been involved with or have witnessed employee dissatisfaction, it's been linked to one of these three criteria.

Think of the relationships you have with your staff as a bank account. For every positive leadership action you display, there's a credit added to the account, for every negative action, a debit. What's your balance? Think about that as you communicate and direct your staff members. No one has greater influence on an employee's motivation level than his or her direct supervisor. Studies have shown that the No. 1 reason employees leave their jobs is because they didn't get along with their manager.

I can recall talking to a superintendent this past winter at the GIS in New Orleans. We were attending a class on leadership and the question arose about whether you should spend time getting to know your employees and coaching them to make decisions for themselves. He felt that building relationships with his staff members was not that important and that everyone has his job to do – simply do it and we'll all get along. He didn't have time to build relationships with his staff members; he had better things to do.

I imagine many of you can relate to his comments. If so, I would encourage you to put yourself in your employees' shoes and ask, "What's my incentive to be here and what do I have to gain?" Talk to your employees about their motivation levels and how you could be a better leader. You might be surprised by what you hear.

I'll leave you with a quote from the godfather of leadership quotes, corporate trainer Zig Ziglar. "You will get all you want in life if you help enough other people get what they want." Enjoy the rest of the season. **GCI**