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"School Leaders' Well-being"

Keynote Address

by

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On behalf of
The Legal Fund of State School Leaders

One Day Seminar titled

"Protect Yourself: The Legal Fund at Work"

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Introduction

Opinions are like belly-buttons – everyone has one." Well, at least that's the polite version of that particular saying – there is another – but the polite one will do for now.

But opinions are what I'm delivering today. Certainly, you may not agree with my opinions, but I sincerely hope that you would agree that I have the right to express them.

Where do I get my opinion from?

I have been a distant journeyman -- the analogy is that it's like the Education Dept has been like a train on a track travelling. Alongside the track I have been driving along on a parallel road. Sometimes, the road has been very close to the track – other times, the road deviates from the track and I can't see the train at all. And by the way, the Education train seems to be travelling faster and faster each year.

So, what is that parallel road that I've been on adjacent to the Education track?

- My 1st job was with Federal Govt – undertook Intellectual & Educational Assessments plus Career Guidance for adolescents so I was aware of the train
- Then for 10 years I lost sight of the Train as I moved to the University of Queensland for 7 years tutoring and lecturing in Psychology and then 3 years lecturing at Macquarie University in Sydney in the Masters level Clinical, Counselling and School Counselling Programs.
- However, I go up close and personal in the mid 1980's as I took over the role of Director at the Child & Family Centre:

- -- this was a Unit attached to the Dept of Psychiatry at the then Adelaide Children's Hospital – it was located just down from the Hospital in Melb Street at North Adelaide
- it was a withdrawal unit for children at Primary School who had major or severe behavioural problems
- it was a multi-disciplinary unit – in the front house, it contained a reception area, and offices for a full-time social worker, occupational therapist, psychologist, and a psychiatric technician, with a fully fitted class room at the back for up to 12 students with 2 teachers and 2 P/T teacher aides.
- I was in and out of schools and in and out of classrooms liaising, training, coordinating and providing therapy and counselling
- From late 1980's for 10 years, I could see the train in the distance as I went into private practice and did a range of tasks including intellectual and educational assessments plus career guidance in schools either individually or with class groups. I also interacted with a good number of staff on the train in relation to students and their specific behavioural issues.
- In the mid 1990's, the train was close as I undertook referrals from the Personnel Counsellors in the Department under their EAP Program – it was then that I started to engage some of the managers at Train Headquarters about teacher and leader issues in schools and the apparent lack of support – never quite sure why in the end, but the EAP contract with me was terminated.
- In the late 1990's, I moved more into coaching after completing a course in coaching at the University of Sydney and then undertook a further course with the College of Executive Coaching located at Pismo Beach in California.
- From early 2000, I started to coach leaders in Education – Principals, Deputies and staff from the Train Headquarters. This brought me up close and personal to the train.

- I am also on the Board of a not-for-profit agency called “Youth Opportunities” which runs 10-week programs in schools for Year 10 students and I frequently visit schools to attend graduations of these students
- Right now therefore, I can see into the carriages – the train is moving faster than it has before and it looks like a lot of people are just hanging on for dear life. A few are hanging on for the next stop called "Retirement". Most don't know though where the train is heading.....

My Bias

I have a bias that I need to share with you. I think that the job of a Principal, A Deputy or a District Director, is the hardest job that there is.

- Most teachers that I know got into the job because it was a kind of calling – they wanted to make a difference in lives – young lives.
- There is often a passion to contribute to society and society's well-being (often to the detriment of their own well-being)
- Some got into it back then because there were government scholarships going and it seemed like an ok thing to do – besides, teachers were respected back then...
- But the job hasn't turned out in the way that their initial dreams would have led them to believe:
 - there is a distinct perception that leadership roles have been intensified to an unacceptable level
 - business units are being asked to be competitive in a "commercial" environment without appropriate support
 - there has been a dramatic increase in relation to the paperwork that now needs to be completed and particularly in relation to directives handed down from head office
 - leaders have been given the responsibility, but not the resources or the authority

- put another way, there is a sense that there exists the situation of, All care, All responsibility, and little, if any resources
- the skill sets required to be a principal today are different and hugely varied – just look at the list
 - ➡ principals are asked to be:
 - ➡ an educator / guider / mentor /
 - ➡ PLUS in a social context.....
 - ➡ a sociologist / psychiatrist / Psychologist / social worker
 - ➡ PLUS in a commercial context
 - ➡ a business planner / accountant /commercial manager
 - ➡ PLUS plus in a human context
 - ➡ an HR Manager / lawyer / industrial relations officer
 - ➡ and all in an environment that has higher expectations overall where the stakeholders are many and varied including staff (both professional and nonprofessional), parents, students, governing council, district office, the community, line managers such as district directors not to mention head office.

And you ask me why the job is necessarily difficult?

Any principal today, given the myriad of tasks that they are required to perform and the pressures under which they are asked to perform it, and the stakeholders that they need to be accountable to, could indeed, very successfully run a private enterprise or a commercial business in the wider world.

My opinion is, that if you can run a school given the restraints, the pressures, the intensity, and the expectations already listed above, then running a business in the commercial world would be a walk in the park. (The irony though is that most principals don't believe this and don't believe that they have the skills to survive [and thrive] in the outside world.)

Given the pressures that principals and leaders are now under, it is quite remarkable that any make it through the journey to successfully see it to its end at retirement without having a major train wreck along the way or without being derailed at some point on the journey.

Case Study 1 -- note that this case has been abbreviated for the written version of this paper

Key points are:

Let me introduce you to Janet. She is the principal of a school. Janet attends at my office distressed and confused and not at all sure what to do. She recites that there have been some issues with managing staff.

- She said that she was called to a meeting with a Personnel Counsellor and the District Director
- She reports that the District Director did not seem particularly interested and left the process to the Personnel Counsellor who met with Janet over a few days.
- This was followed by the Personnel Counsellor then meeting with staff individually and then with the whole staff group together.
- Staff then wanted to know if this was the only process that was going to occur. Consequently, the District Director was brought back in to meet with all the staff.
- Janet feels isolated; staff seem to have all the say. When do I get a say? Where is the evidence, she asked? Where's the evidence that I'm really seriously at fault on various issues?
- What were the issues that staff were unhappy about:
 - not meeting deadlines consistently
 - only selecting certain people do discuss issues with, within the staff room
 - and not communicating well or not listening
- 2 SSO's are driving this whole process
- Janet is now confused and distressed because she is given three options:
 1. leave and find another role
 2. work through it with the staff
 3. look for other positions
- Janet feels, "hung out to dry".
- Janet takes sick leave and long service leave
- She is unsure whether she wants to ever work for the Department again

I ask you -- How is it that a principal can be so unsupported by her hierarchy, while at the same time that she feels as though she has no rights, that her reputation is besmirched, and she is asked to undertake one of three significant options which are all probably career limiting.

What has gone so terribly wrong?

The issues involved were clearly not significant, nor sufficiently serious that such would warrant leaving and finding another role or looking for other positions.

How is it that according to Janet, a school principal can be sidelined through the alleged instigation of 2 SSO's?

Case Study 2 -- note that this case has been abbreviated for the written version of this paper

Key points are:

At the time of the first consultation, Grant described himself as "shattered" and was slightly teary. He explained that he was a school Principal. He indicated that he had won the position on merit on two occasions and considered that he was highly skilled in relation to interpersonal and communication skills and had had work appraisals indicating same.

Historically, he explained that that:

- There had been a group of non-complying staff on varying work practices where this group of teachers felt "victims" because they had to change their practices
- DECS introduces a Statewide support service for teachers and therefore there were further changes being brought about; again, there was some resistance among staff and some resentment
- There had been some building changes where staff had to be moved
- There were a set of teachers who allege that other teachers were "not pulling their weight"; this instigated a series of meetings with the District Director at the time where the Union was called in
- Grant begins to receive some initial harassment; the matter with the teachers is largely unresolved. At this stage too, it also becomes clear to Grant that the Department does not always give the support to its leaders such as principals in the way that might have been expected and in this

regard, he felt that she had been put "out on a limb" with no support from the Department

- A further issue where no one wanted to work with a particular staff member and therefore they put in ED155's complaining about unsafe work practices; the District Director was called in again as was the Union and inevitably, the Department "backed down" and did not support Grant.
 - Grant feels undermined in his role and staff agitation begins to increase with two contract part-time teachers for example, agitating with the union to gain full-time employment.
 - The OH&S representative becomes quite militant; the Union again is involved
 - District Director informs Grant somewhat curtly that he, the DD, had received a Hazard Report; Grant was then informed that there would be a full inquiry where all staff would be interviewed.
 - Grant was then subject to Union harassment as well as intimidation from various staff members; his anxiety increases significantly; he experiences sleep disturbance, including early morning awakening and an inability to go to sleep, is not eating appropriately and feels nauseas, as well as generally tense and on-guard; he finds it difficult to concentrate both at work and at home, has lowered work productivity and finds it difficult to make decisions and to think clearly.
 - He continues to feel under siege now having to document all the ways that he is being intimidated as well as making sure that procedurally, he carefully monitors all meeting minutes and documents.
 - He continues to receive little assistance, if any, from the District Director.
 - Grant informs that the report has been completed and the Inquiry had had a "positive" outcome where he had been exonerated. However, the following day, the Union rejected the report; this devastates Grant who wonders how this could happen given that there had been a long drawn out process and inquiry and since it seemed that the Union did not like the findings, it simply rejected the conclusions.
 - Grant feels that his reputation has been severely damaged and while his school record had been impeccable to this point in time, he feels quite devastated that individuals were making comments about his leadership and his style as well as about him as a person.
 - Grant goes on extended sick leave
-

I ask you – "How could a situation like this be allowed to get so badly out of control?" Where was the support for the Principal? How come the DD didn't stand up and be counted? How is it that the AEU now seems to side with the teachers rather than with the principal? Is this simply a case of numbers with respect to membership subscriptions or is there some other reason?

What are the Hints that the Train line is buckled?

Maybe you do not agree that the train line is buckled and that given the factors outlined, that we are heading for a train wreck. Maybe you only consider that the line is just slightly warped or that really speaking, it's just a simple case of the line expanding in hot weather and contracting in cold weather and that actually, it really is nothing out of the ordinary. In other words, we can expect some expansion and contraction in the line and things are running fairly smoothly all things considered.

I would put to you that the line is severely buckled and that we are heading for a train wreck. Surely, we have already had numbers of casualties; good leaders who are now bloodied and bruised and some virtually "written off". Tragically, there are also the suicides where it all gets just too much.

So, what are the signs that the line is badly buckled?

1. Train Drivers are not supported (i.e. Principals have no apparent formal system of support)

Surveys within the Education Department indicate that almost all (99%) of principals and senior leaders have utilised family and friends as sources of support. However, there was also a trend for younger principals with less than four years experience in the position to turn more to the district office or other senior leaders.

Interestingly though, data trends beyond four years in the role of principal, showed a crisis of confidence where leaders felt more overwhelmed, more burnt out, and less able to cope. Interestingly too, beyond this period of time there was a consensus that principals received what was termed "unhelpful support" from the District Director or the district office personnel in that principals' expectations or requirements were not being met. As one principal stated:

"Hands on support from district office which undermined the school leadership by empowering a parent to have a direct link to many within the district office, effectively cutting us out of the loop."

2. Crisis of Culture within the Train headquarters.

Within the Train headquarters, there was something called "RADAR" which was a survey, conducted annually, which measured and assessed the psychological health of the Train headquarters. Over the last four years however, the results of the survey have gone down each year indicating that the general morale and culture of the headquarters continues to plummet.

So what is the remedy to fix this debilitating trend?

The remedy that the headquarters have decided to implement given this continuing downward spiral over four years, has been to simply scrap the survey in its fifth year!

If we don't measure it, perhaps it'll will all go away, or perhaps it might somehow miraculously get better by itself.

Interestingly, it has been suggested by some cynics, that if the survey had actually been completed on the Train headquarters by **all** the staff at the train stations and the sub-stations, that the results would have been so low such that the survey would have been cancelled after the first or second year rather than after the fourth year.

3. Lack of Train Driver Experience in the Corporate Executive Team (i.e. lack of Principal education experience in the Corporate Executive Team)

Once upon a time, the cream of the principal train drivers used to be promoted through the principal-ship to Inspector to State Office and then to the Executive Team.

Currently, none of the Corporate Executive Team have ever been a principal – one has been a Superintendent as I understand, but none have been a school leader.

Do you have to have been a school principal to be on the executive team? Probably not. In the same way that obviously you don't have to be a female to be a gynaecologist!

Nevertheless what are the implications of this apparent lack of principal experience?

Possibly, there could be an argument that the Executive Team is not fully cognizant nor empathic with both the current role and the future role of a school principal. Secondly, principals lack a direct relationship with the Executive team and now people in the field are not known individually or personally.

4. Train Inspectors are mis-named (i.e. District Directors are mis-named)

District Directors are really inappropriately titled. They ought to be called, "Fire fighters" or perhaps "crisis workers" or maybe "trauma workers".

Currently there are 18 District directors (soon there will be 12 Regional Directors) who have something around 65 schools to look after. Yet, the HR literature (that I'm informed the Education Dept has on its files) shows quite clearly that **seven** is about the number that is most appropriate in order to conduct effective supervision. Doing your rough maths, District Directors are nine times over that recommended supervision number.

How can they effectively manage? How can they effectively supervise? How can they effectively support their schools and more particularly the principals in their area?

(One District Director or firefighter from the north of the State, I recall, used to pilot a plane in order to try to be able to get to his “bushfires.”)

5. Young conductors are not interested in train driving (i.e. Young teachers are not putting up their hand for leadership roles)

It is difficult to attract young teachers into leadership roles. Both surveys and anecdotal evidence says that teachers are not wanting to step forward into roles such as coordinators or more especially, deputy principals. Why so?

What I'm told by teachers is that they see first-hand the way that principals work including the pressure and stress that they are under as well as the hours of work that they undertake. And who wants that?

[Let me quote from an Article by Jennie Douglas, titled, "Why so Heavy a Load?" Principal Matters, 2003, Page 8-9]

"Most parents work and are unable to make school council meetings, sub-committee meetings, working parties or project groups during the day. Most parents are unable to come and watch their children perform in musical productions during the day or participate in family maths sessions or science sessions or to see any other of the great educational programs their children are involved in during the day.

So, most principals and many teachers, who also work during the day, often return to school at night, to a dark, cold school building, where they spend their evenings running school council meetings, entertainment evenings and sundry other items for the community. And this sort of commitment is rarely seen by the community as a bonus; rather it is expected!

Many school principals don't go home between late afternoon and evening meetings. Often the school is too far from home or there is a decision to use the 'spare' time to get some of the work done they think they should have done during the day. In fact, the work wasn't done during the day because they were dealing with student welfare issues.

Many principals work 15-hour days, at least three or four times a week, because they care. However, these same principals also believe that they couldn't

possibly ask parents to take time out of their busy days to become more involved in their children's education.

The sad part about all of this is that most of these principals believe they must work 'double shifts' in order to maintain their credibility.

They simply believe that this is the way it is. This is what you must do if you choose to become principal. 'Double shifts' and weekend work are just a normal part of the job. It cannot be done any other way! And most principals really believe this!

Well, in my opinion martyrdom isn't part of the job. School principals, like everyone else are entitled to work a 38-an hour week. Like everyone else, they are entitled to a private life where they see their families. It might seem revolutionary, but I think school principals are entitled to a life away from the workplace!

..... what happens is that the principal puts his or her personal needs at the bottom of the list of time priorities.....

School principals are expected to be on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week they also expect it of each other because they have allowed themselves to become caught up in such a deal-laden culture."

Young teachers do not want to follow in the footsteps where they lose their life, they lose touch with their family and their friends, and sadly, they lose touch with themselves.

Ironically however, we know that by the year 2018, 48% of the current educational workforce will no longer be present having moved off into retirement and another way of living. Interestingly, most of this 48% who are typically baby boomers are also the leaders in various educational units and schools. We have been warned that we will have a leadership crisis within the education Department and within our schools. However, irrespective of the warnings, and irrespective of what the data tell us, nothing has been done to promote leadership, to support leadership, and to encourage leadership within education.

Why do we not heed these dire warnings?

6. Young people not wanting to get on the train (i.e. Young people are not choosing teaching as a career)

When I first started career guidance as a psychologist over 30 years ago, teaching was held in high esteem and was considered an important option for secondary students to pursue as an occupation (as were some other occupations). It was a popular choice for students to consider.

(Today, I still do career guidance for adolescents although I have noted over those decades that the ratio of adolescence to adults for career guidance used to be about 90% adolescents to 10% adults. Today the ratio is more like 30% adolescents to 70% adults. Times have changed.)

So has the way that adolescents in particular now view teaching. Typically, in almost every case, if teaching appears on any of the reports or profiles that are generated for an adolescent, the response will be that there is no way that they would want to engage in the teaching profession.

They say things like:

- *"I wouldn't want to have to teach a class like ours"*
- *"I wouldn't want to work after hours and have to mark papers over the weekend"*
- *"I wouldn't want to have to deal with all the behaviour problems"*
- *"I wouldn't want to have to attend parent teacher interviews at night or coach sports team on the weekend"*

I cannot remember the last time in my career guidance program that an adolescent chose teaching as a serious career option to pursue.

In fact, I have been told that individuals who elect teaching now only do so because it is their third or fourth or fifth preference on the SATAC form. Having said that, I'm sure that there are many people who do put down teaching as a

first preference, however anecdotally, I am informed that many more get into teaching on something other than their first preference. In other words, it's not really where they want to be.

What is happening in the teaching profession that we are not attracting strong graduates? What has to be done in order for teaching to again be a respected career?

7. The Train HQ and Train Stations are reportedly not a safe place to work? (i.e. Head office and schools are not considered safe in which to work)

It is now a public document because of the judgement handed down as a result of the Supreme Court Action of Francis McDonald versus the State of South Australia. From all reports, Mr McDonald was a teacher who had a pre-existing medical condition known to the Department. The judgement in this matter was delivered on 21 May 2008. His honour Justice Anderson found in favour of the plaintiff Mr McDonald and, largely excepting his evidence, found that the defendant (DECS) had breached its duty by failing properly to follow complaints by Mr McDonald about his workloads including failing to deal with a grievance lodged by him about workplace issues. Mr McDonald was awarded \$392,000.

In short, the layman's version is that the department did not look after McDonald. The judge also reported a number of things about the nature of the investigations that were undertaken by the Department.

Are there any implications here for principals, let alone staff generally? Perhaps one implication might be that if I as a principal have a problem with staff and head office is called in to assist, what are the assurances that head office will actually carry out the matter fully and comprehensively? Furthermore, as a principal, can you be ensured that you are always informed of all the events that may be involved in any investigation process? Finally, will Train HQ really look after you?

8. Different interpretations of the rules?

Principals think that policies and procedures and resources are there to support them, but the reality is that there are different interpretations of these policies and procedures depending on who you talk to.

Different opinions within Train headquarters. Different opinions both within and without Train HQ.

Implication? It is important not to rely on just one source of information. Double-check the advice.

9. The Train headquarters is now devolving responsibility down to the train stations for any offence that occurs (i.e. Head office is pushing more responsibility down the line)

Section 58 of the OHS& W Act came into being at the beginning of this year.

Essentially, what it says is that line managers (i.e. principals) and not the department's responsible office is accountable for any offence that occurs.

So what is the case scenario in this instance? Basically, if an offence occurs usually the responsible officer within the department itself, would respond, as it is the department that controls the investigation process. Instead, it is much more likely now that the department will review the conduct of the operational staff's performance (i.e. the principal's performance). In basic terms, it appears that this new Section 58 now allows the department to blame principals whereas before, it used to be the departments responsible office.

How is it therefore, that school leaders are getting delegated material to them from head office without any training or real assistance in understanding and managing those delegations?

Where is the training, for example, in performance management or underperformance? What do principals currently do? Anecdotally, it sounds like they access their own networks and make their own judgements on how to interpret or act or respond to various delegations handed down.

Further, there is a clear trend across the board for many HR responsibilities being devolved down to line managers (i.e. School Leaders)

[Let me quote from Article from Line Dancing, June 2008, “HR Monthly” – Page 15-16]

"HR's is on outsourcing and evolving many of its traditional activities, says Carol Kulik, research professor in HR management at the University of South Australia.... The HR Managers say 'Oh yes' and the line managers [ie school principals] say 'Oh no, We can't take on any more.' HR managers think the trend is not over. Line managers [ie school principals] think it is done." [brackets mine]

Note the so-called bottom line – “the trend is not over”. In other words, there is more devolution to happen and it will fall into the lap of principals.

10. Train HQ doesn't like bad press (i.e. Head office doesn't like bad press!)

An article in 2003 in the education journal, “Principal Matters” reports that the education profession is in a crisis.

[Let me again quote from the Article 'Why So Heavy a Load?' by Jennie Douglas, Page 9-10]

"Why is it that we read newspaper headlines such as: ' Teachers Urge New Measures to End Violence -- Attacks in Schools are a Growing Menace' and 'Shortage of School Principals Looming' (*Sunday Age*, 17 August, 2003)? There are many documented accounts of teachers and principals being assaulted and threatened, either at school or, even worse, in their own homes. The unbelievable thing is that some of this emotional or physical bullying of principals is perpetrated by teachers on each other, as well. Why is it that the workplace of school principals and the teachers of children can be so unsafe?

Why is it that education departments are more concerned about media attention than whether their employees are safe or being fairly treated?

There are many examples..... where the relationship between school principals and some members of their community have broken down. In many cases, the parents involved immediately assume that the principal doesn't care or doesn't want to help them, for whatever reason. Sometimes they are just plain belligerent and demanding. They write to the minister, complaining about their perceived lack of attention from the principal. They contact the media; they talk to other parents make the whole situation untenable. I must emphasise at this point that most parents are very supportive and understanding - but a small minority can make life hell.

Many principals are even removed from their positions by the Department when allegations are made by disgruntled parents. This is often done before any decisions have been made about whether or not the charges were justified and before the accused has been given an opportunity to be fully informed of the allegations made against them. This removal usually means that, because so much social and emotional damage has been done, the accused person cannot return to their school, even when all charges are subsequently dismissed. The general feeling among principals.... is that, once this kind of action is set in train, they are judged guilty until proven innocent. When will Society stop and take note?

Anecdotally too, I have been told by people in the Train headquarters that schools try to keep bad news stories out of the media. It is alleged that some schools are not sending in critical incident forms because they do not want headquarters to know how bad it really is. It is argued that principals have to go

for their jobs every five years and that accordingly, schools are value-judged and therefore, it is in the principal's interests not to put in critical incident forms. Whether this is true or not is unclear.

Nevertheless, experience shows that where there's smoke there's fire. Furthermore, if it is true that some principles are at odds trying to quell down bad news stories, then, such only means that they carry extra weight and stress on such matters.

What are the Hints that the Train line is buckled?

Given the above, I am as I said, of the opinion that the current train track is severely buckled and that the implications are therefore, that we are heading for a track wreck.

To the best of my knowledge, the only support that principals really have is the ones that they set up informally by themselves with one or two or maybe three trusted colleagues with whom they keep in touch by phone, perhaps the occasional breakfast or perhaps coffee.

Hence, it was about four years ago that I felt quite strongly about this notion of school principals being unsupported in their workplace. After discussing the situation with various advisers and being told that the problem was as bad as it seemed to be for education leaders, I was encouraged to contact the South Australian Centre for Leaders in Education located at Hindmarsh. I outlined what I had observed and what I had been told and indicated that there needed to be a proactive program for principals that was about assisting their personal and organisational psychological health. The meetings with SACLE were quite congenial and friendly and I enjoy the interaction.

I was told at the time that the Centre had noted the following for School leaders:

- Some leaders are working hard but feeling alone and therefore when difficult issues arise they feel at risk.
- Others feel that they lack the authority to make decisions, but have to carry the responsibility.
- Risk-taking requires both confidence and knowledge. People need to feel connected to the system and or a support network, and need to be confident that they can discuss issues in a confidential manner before they take courageous action.
- DD or other more senior personnel are too busy to assist at school leaders with the hard stuff, particularly, but not only about personnel issues.
- Some school leaders rarely use their colleagues to support them through difficult issues.
- School leaders were often reluctant to ask for help because of feelings of shame and guilt. If they did ask for help, the other person may not have the appropriate skills to coach them through to possible options.
- Some school leaders are working ridiculous hours.

As a result of our discussions together, it was decided to pull together a leadership program for school principals called "*Investing in Yourself*".

There were a number of facets to the program including:

- Allowing principals to group themselves into small clusters of between three to five individuals who were trusted allies. This group would meet regularly to support each other and discuss issues.
- A series of surveys was to be conducted to highlight the hot issues that principals had previously experienced as a way of organising topics that were relevant and pertinent.
- Half day workshops or breakfast meetings was also going to be arranged on various topics or matters of concern.

- Every principal was to have a "buddy" to whom they would be accountable and with whom they could talk openly and confidentially.
- Formal coaching was to be offered for those who wished to take up the opportunity and this could either be in a face-to-face format or by telephone.

The proposal was put to the Train headquarters for funding through Occupational Health and Safety. The proposal was rejected. No funding was provided.

I considered that this was not a well thought through decision. I recall making certain noises in various places about the fact that, as far as I could see, principals were not encouraged nor supported. I got no-where within the Dept itself. I therefore talked to a Senior Govt Advisor.

My rumblings at that time must have caused sufficient consternation within Head Office of the Education Department, in that I to my surprise I received an e-mail. Indeed, I was invited to a luncheon to have a personal discussion with the then executive director of human resources. I arrived at the luncheon to be met by one of her managers plus herself. I put an opinion as to the plight of principals and school leaders and suggested a proactive approach would be critical involving individual coaching together with the implementation of what could be called mastermind groups or what I've already called "cluster groups". She had little idea of coaching and had not heard of the concept of mastermind groups. Following the luncheon, and as I promised I would, I dutifully sent a folder of relevant articles and material on both coaching and mastermind groups and indicated that I was happy to have a follow-up meeting. The silence to follow was deafening.

I did follow-up further though. The reply was, more or less, don't bother calling us, we will call you.

I followed up the other day with someone who knew about the SA Centre for Leaders in Education and was told it really had "got no better with leadership" and that "leaders can be harassed and intimidated by someone and there is no real way to deal with it and it is rife in the system."

As an aside, I have also been informed that there is currently no policy on the defamation of a principal within the Education Department. To where do principals or leaders turn if they have been defamed? How is it that the Department has not seen fit to this point in time to have this covered off?

Moreover, consistent with the case studies that I put before you I have also been informed that within Train HQ, there is a lack of proper HR process when dealing with complaints and that once a principal is removed from a school while an investigation takes place, irreparable damage is normally done. It was suggested to me that principals must be involved in the writing of such policies and procedures re investigations and re defamation and this needs to be a matter of urgency.

I would add to this that I would have thought it was a matter of urgency four years ago, and now at this time, it would be absolutely mandatory that it be given immediate attention.

Case Study 3 -- note that this case has been abbreviated for the written version of this paper

Key points are:

Tim had been in education for over 34 years and a principal for over 14 years. He decides that he will not wait until his retirement to enjoy some of his long service leave and therefore decides to take off for a period.

- In his absence, an SSO who had been at the school for an extended period of time and who had built up her own power base decided to mount a case with other staff to have the Deputy principal be appointed as the principal

- Tim is back at school two weeks and four staff go off to head office to air their apparent grievances none of which were known to Tim at that time
 - Tim says that he certainly wants to be cooperative and agrees to an investigation
 - It takes eight months to complete the investigation only then for most of it to have been lost!
 - Tim finally receives a letter from Head Office which he could only describe as "disgusting" where he felt that his reputation had been besmirched and he felt that his career was now in tatters
 - He does not return to the school
 - After an extended period of rehabilitation, he looks for outside employment
-

How is it that apparently, a militant SSO can gain sufficient power within a staff group to then lobby such that the principal has to undergo an investigation and feels ostracised and isolated and eventually, considers that his career was stalled?

Case Study 4 -- note that this case has been abbreviated for the written version of this paper

Key points are:

Andrea was the principal of the school where there was also a principal for the junior primary school. It was reported that the principal of the junior school wanted to make a separate school rather than be combined with the senior primary school.

- The District Director has little or no idea what to do; following frequent requests for assistance to resolve the issues, the DD has little idea of which path to follow or what to do.
- The junior school principal puts in a complaint about Andrea being discriminatory and the District Director reportedly refers the matter to the personnel Counsellor who is called in.
- A facilitator is appointed and tries to coordinate a meeting with the junior primary principal, but each time that person pulls out. (Andrea is exasperated about what to do and feels completely powerless; she is not sure which processes are being followed or what really is happening.)
- A report is finally compiled.
- Andrea is then summoned to head office and offered an alternative job.
- Andrea is shocked and taken aback in that she has not been told of any particular allegations except that she is being moved to an alternative position. She considered that the allegations must be extremely serious; eight months later she has still not received a copy of the allegations
- Andrea resigns

- Inevitably, it appears that after legal intervention, she was exonerated and it was found that there was no substance to the allegations.
-

How is it that a school principal can be treated in such a manner as to be removed from their position in the absence of any allegations which inevitably proved to be a little substance? What is wrong with our system that we can allow this to happen to our leaders?

How is it that consistently this poor pattern of behaviour on the part of the department continues to destroy good people who are trying to dedicate their time in their lives to educating young people and making a contribution? How is it that a department can be allowed to continue this sort of behaviour?

Where are the Support Programs?

Support required by principals seems to be requested in **three** distinct categories.

1. Emotional and/or informational support on how to cope with situations.
2. Informational support on how to cope with situations.
3. Specific advice regarding specific issues or situations.

What though could be suggested as a pragmatic way of helping principals cope and deal with a system that does not seem to be supporting and at times, could be construed as even working against them?

It is exactly because of the perceived and actual complete lack of support from Head office and the District office that “The Legal Fund of State School Leaders” has been set up. If leaders had felt that their Train HQ was working with them and supporting them, then, there would have been no need for a Legal Fund. In other words, it has been the complete ignorance or perhaps arrogance or

perhaps incompetence of Train HQ (or maybe a combination of all three) that principals have had no other option but to secure a Legal Fund.

However, the Legal Fund is reactive and rehabilitative. What could be suggested that was proactive or seeking to be preventative?

Let me offer some alternatives. Maybe you can think of others.

1. Mastermind Group Coaching

The concept of the mastermind group was introduced by Napoleon Hill almost 100 years ago in his best-selling book, "Think and Grow Rich."

"No two minds ever come together without thereby creating a third, invisible intangible force, which may be likened to a third mind," he wrote.

The two most popular types of mastermind groups are industry-specific and peer-based.

Industry-specific involves professionals who represent the same industry such as health care, real estate, and education.

The Peer-based mastermind groups involve people at the same professional level. Participants could include executives from diverse, non-competing industries such as CEOs of insurance, pharmaceutical, financial companies or perhaps Principals of primary schools or Principals of secondary schools.

The format of a mastermind group is only limited by the leader or moderator's imagination. The Moderator is sometimes called the Group Coach.

That's right, the group does have a Moderator and typically someone outside the group who is independent and can act as an independent chair without fear of upsetting friends or neighbours or getting caught in a kind of conflict of interest with his or her peers.

The mastermind group also has a set of rules by which they need to adhere such as the strictness of confidentiality, that members in the group are supported and encouraged rather than criticised or reprimanded. This group is not there as a gossip session, a talk fest, a general chat; it works on real issues in a trusted setting guided by the moderator or group coach.

Participants in a mastermind group bring their issues to the group, their challenges, their opportunities and because of the synergy of the group, this means that they leave each session more energised with more ideas and new possibilities and a sense of renewal.

Something amazing happens when you are in a group of other like-minded people who are working towards similar goals.

Mastermind group coaching allows people to reach a level of accomplishment they could never achieve on their own. While the group is certainly there to encourage each other and provide trusted support, it may also be the case that some individuals may require individual attention from the moderator or the coach.

2. Principal Support Service

Full marks to the New South Wales Principals' Associations who lobbied their State government in 2002 to address the issue of principal stress and workload ahead on. They recognised that principals were in trouble. Many were stressed, becoming ill and sadly even committing suicide under the workload the

community required. The current Minister for Education at that time, John Watkins, showed remarkable courage, after lobbying by the principals' associations, to create a Principal Support Service within the general bureaucracy.

In 2003, 10 people were allocated to this principal support team, all paid by the government to support principals. The team was headed up by a primary and a secondary principal who were hired by the Department for this specific purpose.

The team runs a Principal Support Hot Line, which is used by principals for a broad range of reasons. Whether it is about discussing policy implications, interpersonal relationship breakdowns, organisational issues, emotionally draining issues, such as the death of a parent or child school community, or just hearing the sound of a supported voice on the end of the line.

Importantly and critically, all of this is confidential and cannot be used against principal at a later date.

Principals are nurtured, understood, supported and not assumed guilty until proven innocent. Members of the team will go out to district principal meetings to offer solutions, ideas and support. None of this is done in an atmosphere of distrust or blame.

It is high time that the government in this State turned to something like the New South Wales model to see what can be achieved and how it can be maintained and improved. It is time that this government took the role of school principals much more seriously.

3. Formal Coaching Program

The Victorian Education Department has now successfully introduced a coaching programme for school principals. It is called, "Coaching to Enhance the Capability of Experienced Principals".

This program has been running since 2004 offering high-quality coaching to principals and currently, professional coaching continues to be offered to 100 experienced principals per year.

The coaching is provided by an external provider with coaches who are highly experienced in accord with the standards and ethics as outlined by the International Coach Federation which is an independent international Coaching body accrediting coaches and maintaining standards.

From all accounts, the program is well received.

4. Proactive Leadership Training

[Let me quote from an article that I authored in 2004 and was published in the journal "Principal Matters"; the article was titled, "The Price of Learning to Lead at Speed" (Page 18)]

"The irony is that, while I see education departments mouthing the attributes and qualities of school leadership (including mouthing the same to students), I'm not aware of effective leadership programs that are proactively grooming prospective young leaders for their future role. The issue of proactive leadership training is going to be paramount in the next 10 years, as something like half of the current workforce of baby boomers retire. If we don't get serious about training our future principals, then we had better do so because there is going to be a dire shortage of the same in the next decade or two.

Why isn't it mandatorily for every deputy, principal or district superintendent to undergo a serious leadership training program before they take on a more challenging role? In this respect, we are not talking about a two to four-day course or a 10 day 'intensive'.

What is needed is a serious course that allows principals to gain valuable knowledge about what they can and cannot do and what leadership really is about.

Importantly, this course would create confidence and competency. Such a course might build knowledge on the following questions.

- How does leadership differ from management?
- What are the various models of leadership?
- What recipes really work for effective management?
- What is your own style of leadership?
- How do you use power?
- How do you become influential and persuade others?
- What are the tools for effective communication?
- What other skills for conflict resolution?
- How do you run an effective team?
- How do you build your own self-confidence?

Here then are 4 possible proactive programs.

What other programs or interventions would make you feel supported? What would allow you the comfort of knowing that Head office really had your interests at heart? What would you need at the coal-face for you to feel supported? What would either the Train HQ or the District Office need to do to really assist you?

[In closing, let me again quote from the article that I authored in “Principal Matters” in 2004.

"In my work as a coach, primarily with school principals and district superintendents, I am aware of the stress and isolation that many experience. I am also aware that many feel alienated because, as they look around, they know that if anything happens to go wrong, there will be no one there to assist or support them (of course, they don't say this publicly). If anything, the converse occurs.

Instead of support and encouragement, leaders are often 'hung out to dry'. They are blamed for the situation and possibly made to look incompetent or inadequate. Many dare not be open or honest with their employers, their board or colleagues for fear of appearing ineffective or being thought of as a somehow not 'up to the job.'

Life becomes a kind of pretence and faking it to look good. There is nothing like living life on this type of edge to cause real stress.

Of course, it needs to be stated quite clearly that not all school principals feel this way or experience the level of stress I've described. However, in my opinion, there are sufficient numbers of education leaders who are feeling sufficiently burdened and stressed for departments to acknowledge that this is occurring. In the end, there must be some sort of accountability for this situation. Of course, if I have misjudged the situation I would be very relieved and trust that someone will enlighten me."

As I said, that was in 2004.

Following the publication of that article, I received 2 emails of support that said that what was written was entirely accurate and represented the case effectively.

A third email liked what I had to say so much that I was invited to Darwin to undertake a one and a half day workshop with a school.

No-one said that I had mis-judged the situation.

That was in 2004 – what must it be like 4 years later?

I can only trust that 4 years from now I'm not repeating myself. Thank you.

Post-script:

At the conclusion of this keynote, none of the 90 or so principals at the Seminar came up to me to say that I was somehow, mis-guided or had mis-perceived the situation.

Quite the contrary.

The general comment from several sources was that it was refreshing to hear what they'd always known, but couldn't say, and refreshing that someone from outside the department had said it for them.

One principal indicated that there was actually an 11th factor to add to the list of aspects causing the train line to buckle. It was indicated that the 11th item ought to be headed: **“Train HQ doesn't work for the Stations anymore”**. In other words, Train HQ is working for itself or working in isolation from the very schools and students that it is meant to be serving. Damn praise indeed!

Finally, another principal indicated that the train track was no longer buckled. Instead, **the track had been “ripped up”**. The comment was that the track doesn't reach the stations anymore.

How sad. How very, very sad.

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