

1. How would you define your role as a leader? What is your focus? What is really important to you? How do you define important?

I am a firm believer...as a guy...if you're lost; ask for directions, there is nothing to be ashamed of if you don't have all the answers. I know I don't; but what I do have is determination, passion, commitment to excellence and a constant desire for success with change when necessary. These are only some of the characteristics I think of when I think of great leadership. But the question here is how I would define my role as a leader, not what IS a leader. So to answer that question properly, let me think of several great leaders before us and what they have in common with my role: Winston Churchill, (no particular order, just free thinking-except for Churchill of course) Steve Jobs, Dr. Seuss, Golda Meir, Eleanor Roosevelt, Harry Potter, Paul McCartney, Mary Poppins, Walt Disney, Bill Gates, Thomas Jefferson, and many others, but let me move forward.

In selecting those leaders above, they have passion, commitment, knowledge, trust, relationships, vision, people orientation, and selflessness. It is these characteristics that I strive for in defining my role as a leader. Although I have been committed to these qualities every day for the past 8 years since I entered the world of administration, I began seeking these skills back in HS as my swim team captain for two years and team leader for three. Every action, decision, conversation, and roll-out I do defines who I am and have been as a leader. My actions in each of those situations has been sometimes viewed as distinguished and commendable and other times as foolish, but in all cases I have personally grown and learned more about what it means to be a leader. I have worked hard to learn from my colleagues, staff, family, and friends input and what they think of many of the decisions I have made. I know that it is not without their help and guidance that I would be where I am today and on my path to being a more successful leader.

As for my focus in leadership, that changes as my career changes. This past year I was made the Math, Science, and Technology Instructional Leader for the Mineola Middle School. The prior year, three veteran teachers within a department of only four, retired along with the previous Math IL. My focus for that year was to make three new young teachers the best they could be. It was through a critical lens and leadership, guidance, and modeling that they are well on their way to being not just proficient, but distinguished educators. Several years earlier, I was in a "battle" with a "well tenured" teacher who found it necessary to ask for union intervention and request that I never be allowed to talk to her without a witness because she felt I was harassing her (was not the outcome); this past year as I prepared to relocate to the HS, she shared with me how much I have helped her grow since she has had children of her own and in the development of her lesson plans! Next year as I become the 8th grade administrator in a new grade reconfigured building, my focus on leadership will be that of the 8th grade students, teachers, families, and faculty as a whole. I look forward to this important challenge and am glad the district has selected me on the merit of my showing distinction within the district and community.

As for how I define important, you only need to read my attached mission statement for Dr. Rudiger's class. I end question one with a quote from Peter Senge, "collaboration is vital to sustain what we call

profound or really deep change, because without it, organizations are just overwhelmed by the forces of the status quo.”

2. Do you have clear sense of purpose? What are your core values? What are your beliefs about leading and motivating people?

Purpose, purpose, purpose. I have never thought specifically about a “clear sense of purpose” to my life, but have asked if there is a clear purpose to many of the individual actions I engage in, to that I say yes. If you asked me 16 years ago what do I want, I would have told you to have a wife, 2-3 kids, a dog, white picket fence, and be a teacher. Well here I am, at 36 with 2 kids and one in the belly, a North Shore rescued pup, white picket fence-albeit vinyl, teacher certification and still in the classroom as an administrator, and most importantly, a wonderful wife who I refer to as Saint Suzanne. That would have been my purpose, but it is not complete because I also love self-education. A book I read years ago, Tinkering Towards Utopia, by David Tyack and Larry Cuban, references the educational reform of the last century as almost cyclical in nature. I believe that to be the case. I am hopeful, or should I say purposeful, in desiring to see systemic changes in education that permit greater individualization of instruction similar to the 16th century model of an apprenticeship or the 19th century model of one classroom with differentiation. It is in these models of education that I seek some of my core values.

If we can make learning engaging and enriching, we can continue to strive for excellence. Although Leonardo Da Vinci was a brilliant intellectual and designed many unimaginable inventions, his flying device was doomed to fail by its inability to understand the undiscovered concepts of the *law of aerodynamics*. It is in our instruction that we bring forth intelligence, knowledge, learning and passion for inquiry from all. We cannot break the laws that govern the universe no differently than Da Vinci could make his non-law abiding flying device fly, but we can strive to lead and motivate through encouragement of others in their quest for new and unique discoveries.

To better understand my approach to leading and motivating others, I first share a vision of desired excellence for all. What each person has as a vision of excellence may be different for them, and that is OK, but we must strive for improvement either way. In leading and motivating others, I always try to serve as a mentor/role model first. Through modeling, others learn and see value in time, sometimes not the time we desire, but necessary for inclusion and integration of their ideas, values, and suggestions to the process. It is not unlike leading a horse to water and..., you can only help get them there, they must be invested and feel responsible for themselves. This is how I changed the lab protocol and format for the Mineola science department. To support the realization that leading and motivating must be collaborative, I end with another Peter Senge quote, "People don't resist change. They resist being changed."

3. What procedures, currently in place in your school district or organization, are in the greatest need of change? Why? How would you “lead” the change process?

Wow, this is a loaded question! How do I answer this question fairly when although I am an observer and participant in my district, I may not have all the facts correct? But, as you ask I will share some thoughts.

I am fortunate enough to be part of the grade reconfiguration Mineola district is currently undergoing. As a valued staff member of the administration team, I have been requested to facilitate the reorganization of 8th grade into the high school. I was selected because I am “well-liked by the community,” “understand and know the kids,” “knowledgeable of the 8th grade assessments and curriculum,” and able to teach a required section of Earth Science research. As this new position was shared with me, the superintendent made it clear, the most important task I have, is to “make a trip to Washington D.C. happen.”

With all of the changes that take place with a relocation of a grade, i.e., shipment of materials, placement of staff, scheduling, parent communication, student comfort level, community relations, club and sport development/transportation, etc. I have been involved in the process. I have listened and spoken to many community members from the students during individual homeroom visitations, parent evening workshops and discussion groups, teacher team meetings and after school faculty meetings. Additionally I have been involved with the district leadership team and Central Offices regarding the handling and placement of all necessary pieces.

In recognizing the need for change in the process, I would have allowed members to be a part of [the decision] process, not just listeners. Change is difficult for most people. My wife was disappointed 6 years ago when we agreed it was time to get a family vehicle and get rid of her Saturn and buy a new family car, she ended up loving her new Subaru Outback. Only last month, it was time to move to the “minivan,” she “hemmed and hawed,” but now couldn’t imagine any other vehicle for the family! In being the leader, often we need to be vigilant in recognizing what needs to be done systemically, but equally supportive of all those invested and recognize their value. W. Edwards Deming would not present his ideas for change, unless the company leader was fully invested in the process. Kenneth Craik wrote in *The Nature of Explanation*, “No one ever seems quite satisfied with anyone else’s views,” just like a superintendent does not always agree with the comments shared by the public during open forum, but must minimize their mental models and maximize their ability to be positively influenced!

In conclusion, Winston Churchill said it best, “Continuous effort - not strength or intelligence - is the key to unlocking our potential.”