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## What Teacher Leadership Means to Me

By Chad Horne

In my roles as a father, husband, pet servant, at home, last night I dealt with our family poodle, Rusty, who hurt himself. As a result, our family had a restless night of worry and problem-solving. In my professional role, as a rural school Principal was impacted, as I navigated through the next day somewhat distracted and a little tired. I was reminded of how important relationships are to leadership. Leadership, after all, is about creating a culture where everyone feels valued and supported—even when things are not going perfectly. In my family others show leadership, not just me. In my school, teachers also show leadership. My family and my school are better when I understand this distinction as a family and leader.



More specifically, what about teachers as leaders? Teacher leadership to me is rooted in relationships. And we know relationships are the foundation of great leadership (Johnston, 2023). Something I wholeheartedly agree with, as strong leadership in schools is not confined to a title or position. It is found in how we connect with and empower others. Leadership happens when every member of the school feels valued, trusted, and encouraged to grow. When relationships are strong, so is the leadership that naturally emerges.

*Note 1: Rusty is, not just a dog, but the family friend and a key relationship in this story.*

*Note 2: Chad is a principal of a rural school in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador (Canada). He is also the President of the Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association Small School Council*



I believe that at Point Leamington Academy, leadership is evident throughout our building. It is found in others, or as Anderson (2004) refers to it, there is a mutual reciprocity between principals and teachers as leadership that enriches schools. regardless of their position on our team, everyone contributes to our school's success. Leadership isn't about being in charge; it's about supporting each other and working together toward common goals. When we foster autonomy and provide opportunities for staff to lead in their areas of strength, we see growth and innovation. It also encourages others to

step into leadership roles. When staff members feel supported, valued, and trusted, they are more likely to take risks and embrace their full potential.

But this doesn't just stop with teachers. Students benefit when educators feel empowered and confident in their role. By modeling trust, collaboration, and resilience, teachers set an example for students to follow. Students learn that leadership is not about being perfect or always having the answers. It's about showing up for others, contributing to the greater good, and demonstrating integrity. When students witness these qualities, they begin to develop them as well.

A foundation for a successful administrator is to promote teacher leadership, to support teachers as leaders. If teachers and staff are not feeling encouraged, respected, valued, how can they foster those same feelings in their students? Leadership is about creating a ripple effect that begins with adults in the building. When relationships among staff are strong, they spill over into classrooms and impact on how students learn and interact. Leadership is about more than solving big problems or achieving milestones. It is also found in the small, everyday moments; in the way a staff member feels heard in a staff meeting, in the way someone is encouraged to try something new, or in how we lift each other up when the day feels heavy. These moments of connections are what sustain us and make leadership meaningful.

Rusty's injury reminded me that relationships matter, roles are mutual engaged and matter, not just in our homes, but in our schools. Just as our family rallied around Rusty through his injury, our school community rallies to support each other. Leadership, in essence, is about building a culture of trust, respect, and encouragement—a culture where everyone feels empowered to lead and to succeed. Teacher leadership is about shared responsibility and collaboration. It's a journey we undertake together. Through strong relationships, we create schools that are not only successful but are places where everyone—teachers, students, and yes, even a tired principal—can thrive.

#### References

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