
Preface

The Challenges of Energizing Staff Meetings

In schools today, we face challenges and opportunities. Many teachers report that children have changed and teaching has become more challenging over the years. Some parents have increased their demands on schools and teachers. School budgets have been flat or have decreased, even though accountability standards have increased. With all of these and other pressures faced by schools recently, it is easy to see why some staff members have become disheartened with their work. When the adults in a school have negative feelings about their jobs, these emotions can be transferred to the students; this only makes matters worse.

Effective school leaders have learned that it is important to work with their teachers to energize their work environment. One area in which leaders can have a positive impact is the organization and operation of staff meetings. That is the focus of this book.

Many of us who are currently in or are getting ready to assume leadership positions were not necessarily exposed to energized staff meetings ourselves; we have had to learn strategies and adapt them to fit the needs of our teachers. This book is dedicated to those leaders who want to move beyond the leadership experiences of the past and provide their teachers with energized and motivating settings. Negative emotions can be transmitted across multiple levels in an organization, and so can positive feelings. The positive ideas that you use in your staff meetings will help to establish and nurture the kinds of positive emotions that your teachers will need to stay motivated and focused in their work with students.

As you read this book, you will notice that it has been designed in a slightly different manner than an instructional manual. The main focus of this book is activities that you can use or adapt in working

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with your teachers. Although there is background information that is needed to understand the context of the strategies, we have tried to condense it so that it can be read and understood quickly.

The real details come in the descriptions of the activities. In writing these, we tried to be as detailed as possible so that you can read and immediately implement them in your setting. Many of the activities come from the workshops we have done with school leaders and other professionals over the years. Others have been implemented by one of us in schools, staff development sessions, presentations, facilitation experiences, graduate coursework, and other development activities. Some of the activities have appeared in other books that we have used as research for our professional practice. We have tried to give credit to everyone who has shared some of their wisdom with us over the years.

When considering implementing the activities and ideas contained in this book, keep several things in mind. First, make sure that you try to match the right activity to the needs of your teachers. Second, be sure that the strategies you are considering fit in with your level of comfort and strength areas. Finally, be sure to debrief with staff members after each activity is completed. By debriefing, you ensure that their minds are able to interact with the information they just learned. Also, you can help them begin to develop generalizations and understandings that will go far beyond the staff meeting where they experienced the activity.

The debriefing serves another important function: It helps teachers to transfer the positive emotions that they experienced in the meeting to other settings, such as their classrooms. We are finding that, over the years, many teachers become accustomed to feeling negative emotions in staff meetings and do not notice the positive aspects of a meeting at first unless someone either points them out or helps them to see these positives. Without this awareness, they may just go back into their classrooms and continue the same old behaviors. If this happens, teachers miss a major purpose of the time and energy you spend to energize their staff meetings. Debriefing and helping teachers to draw out their conclusions about the energizing activities increases the chances that they will take not only the activity back to their classrooms but also a positive attitude.

We hope you find this book as helpful to read as we have found it fun to write. As with any book of this nature, it is a work in progress. As we work with more schools and school leaders, we will keep adding to our professional knowledge base, just as you will as you implement some of the ideas and strategies in your own setting.

We would like to hear your ideas and suggestions. Please feel free to contact us at any time with your ideas, questions, or feedback about the activities and ideas that we have provided you. You can reach us at seller3600@aol.com (Sheila) or jellerthree@aol.com (John).

We wish you success in your efforts to energize your staff members; enjoy the journey and give yourself a chance to grow and learn as you take on this challenging and rewarding journey—a journey toward an energized staff.

—Sheila and John Eller

The business of leaders, of heroes, is tricky. Leadership is not something that is done to people, like fixing your teeth. Leadership is unlocking people's potential to become better.

—Former U.S. Senator Bill Bradley