



## Time and Energy

As school districts and schools push toward increased student achievement, the two resources most critical to success are time and energy. In the face of financial pressure and limited funding, using time and energy in optimal ways becomes even more essential.

**Energy:** An article entitled “Energy in Organizations” from The Rensselaerville Institute highlights the importance of energy. “Energy is not only precious but scarce. It is easier to acquire information and even insight than it is to buy energy. In fact you can’t buy energy. You have to make it.”

The key question is, how can schools create and channel energy toward greater results?

Energy is personal, it begins with individuals and builds across the organization. In Get to Great, we ask, who do you know that has tremendous energy? Do they get a lot more done than other people? Energetic organizations are built on energetic people. People with stamina, optimism, enthusiasm, and a sense of humor.

Yet organizational dynamics can also drain energy. One principal told a story about how he went to work each day full of gusto. When he dragged himself home at the end of a long day for the umpteenth time, his wife asked him what was going on. He said, “Honey, each day I go into school feeling full of life and juice, plump as a plum, then all day long they suck the juice out of me, and I walk in the door shriveled up like a prune.”

In talking with school leaders we encourage them to consider both what creates energy and what saps it. Those things which energize leaders are actions which matter, helping a teacher to improve her practice, introducing an innovation which elevates student learning. The sorts of things that people mention as siphoning off their energy are negative individuals and mundane tasks.

Within school districts and schools, the same two questions apply. What creates energy and what drains it? A smart principal or superintendent scans the organization and conducts an informal staff energy audit. Leaders reduce those factors which limit energy and increase those which build it. Endless meetings and planning sap energy, action generates it.

Leaders and their staff members are energized when they see their efforts making a difference for students. Achieving results is what motivates them. Setting and hitting targets causes people to drive toward tangible results and celebrate success. Research demonstrates that this “collective efficacy” among faculty and staff is a foremost factor in increasing student achievement.

**Time:** If energy is the force behind achievement, then time is the dimension in which it is delivered. Few phrases convey more truth than “time is limited”. For school leaders, the question is how to use time in ways that most quickly and powerfully generate elevated student results.

All leaders have probably experienced the plum and prune syndrome as it applies to time. They arrive bright and early, determined to advance the biggest priorities that day and leave having accomplished none of them, buried deeper, with even the shovel under the pile.

The Rensselaerville Institute defines time and energy in three categories: proactive, routine, and reactive. Proactive - you're out in front, making progress on key priorities, doing important things you need to get done. Routine - you're handling the repetitive work that goes along with the job, doing things you have to do. Reactive - you're responding to phone calls, putting out fires, doing things you didn't anticipate.

In order to achieve results, it is important for the leader to control time, to be more proactive in pushing for results, to reduce time on the routine, and to avoid being caught up in the urgent. A skillful leader is able to use time effectively, both personally and within the organization. As with energy, an audit of time is a good starting point. What uses of time create the greatest results? What expenditures of time make little or no difference?

These days there is appropriate emphasis on instructional leadership. In surveys of superintendents and principals, leaders report frustration at not being able to devote more time to student learning and achievement.

In *Get to Great* we advise leaders to set a target - spend 40% of their time, the equivalent of two days a week, on leadership to advance student performance. This involves getting out of the office and into the schools, observing and interacting in classrooms, coaching teacher teams as they strive to hit achievement targets, leading the district and schools in the overall strategy to heighten performance.

To dedicate time, it is essential to save time. Here are a few practical tips. Take a look at all the meetings held and see if you can cut the number and duration in half. Ask and trust your secretary/assistant to help in all possible ways. Clean up your office and get out of it.

Focus time and energy, act, take action!

One of the assistant superintendents whom we work with gave us a Garfield cartoon. The cat is sitting there with his thinking noted in three frames: “I believe in planning ahead, Becaaaauuuuse, if you spend enough time planning, you never have to do anything.”

Rather than extensive planning, instead of dwelling on everything standing in the way, set ambitious targets, enlist energetic colleagues, and get going. Start with an initial strategy, and learn and adjust along the way to hitting the target. With this approach, time works for you, energy expands, and results follow.