

## MESSAGE FROM THE NATIONAL PRESIDENT

DR JIM WATTERSTON, FACEL



I hope this message finds you well and enjoying your work. I would like to start this column by reflecting on my previous message. You may recall that I explored the topic of work/life balance and its importance in creating and fostering innovative and energised school leaders. Finding this balance through identifying

and doing the things which truly make a difference is something I fundamentally believe in and I sought your comments and feedback on this issue. I would like to extend my appreciation to the large number of members who contacted me to share their challenges and successes in striking this balance.

I was also pleased that many of you advised me that the column made you stop and take stock of both your working and personal life. Some of you indicated that this will mean spending a greater percentage of your time in the classroom to share your expertise in learning and teaching to the next generation of school leaders, our teachers, rather than feeling chained to your desk under a mountain of administrative paperwork and bureaucratic obligation.

On this note, I would like to take this topic one step further by providing some thoughts about how it might be possible to let go of tasks that have previously 'tied' you down and how you can build a culture within your work environment where only the work that matters gets done! In my view, the answer resides in building a culture of authentic personalised performance management across your school. Not that 'tick the box' stuff that happens once a year when you conduct 'fireside chats'. I mean quality time on a regular basis that invests in others and builds a culture of appreciation, excellence and value. This is the most satisfying and valuable work that a school leader can engage in as it recognises the commitment of others while fostering positive growth and development. In this kind of environment in which people are free to implement new ideas, make mistakes, learn and ask for help.

A culture of ongoing learning and development is vital in supporting organisational growth, productivity and in enhancing employee capability, retention and performance. It fosters proactive succession planning - something which is particularly pertinent in a profession such as ours, when a significant number of Principals and teachers are expected to retire in coming years.

Like sporting teams or a high quality orchestra, this does not happen by accident or by individuals coaching themselves. In this regard, the renowned American psychologist and philosopher Abraham Maslow pointed us in the right direction back in the 1950s when he developed his theory on human motivation, now days termed as his Hierarchy of Needs. Of course Maslow determined that human development was basically a five stage process where the most basic level of personal needs must be met before an individual will desire the secondary or higher levels needed to thrive - those levels being physiological, safety, belonging, esteem and then self-actualisation. (So where am

I going with this, I can imagine you asking as you labour through this article!)

Well, like Maslow, I believe that if you are going to motivate and authentically support staff, then you have to operate in a similar paradigm to ensure that your performance management is pitched at the right level for each individual in order for them to move forward. If people don't feel safe, confident or their basic needs are not being met from a work perspective, then you are not going to be able to realistically expect high performance until each stage of the hierarchy is addressed. Most performance management systems are built on the 'one size fits all' model and feedback is often a passing comment or not provided at all. In the Maslow model, in addition to ongoing and purposeful feedback, staff members are provided with time, resources and understanding to improve their performance. We all want to know where we fit in and to feel that our contribution is valued. This however, is not always the case unless communication channels are optimised and positively focused.

For relevant professional learning and high quality performance management to be successful, it needs to take place in a workplace where the culture is one that celebrates achievement, hard work, dedication, excellence and innovation. There needs to be a culture that encourages and allows staff to grow professionally and personally in a supportive environment. This can't be created from your office. It takes regular feedback, care and support that is consistent and always available. This is the work that matters. You will know when you have achieved this workplace culture because you won't be the one doing all the work or taking all the risks. There will be a team that plays together and learns on the job. The paradox is the more you invest in others by building on where each person is at, the easier and more satisfying your work will become.

So where do you start in relation to developing this kind of culture? You begin by investing the time into knowing what motivates each individual and you ensure that they have regular access to talk and share with you all of their successes and challenges. You believe that everybody can learn and you let people know that it is your job to help them be the best they can be.

I don't profess to be the expert in this stuff but I do know that performance management systems that keep identifying what people need to do better, drag down morale and decrease motivation. Maslow knew the answer. We are all complex people with our own unique issues and dispositions. Great coaches work with each player differently to get the best out of them. I've noticed that great Principals do the same thing!

Until next time,

