

HEAD CASE...

Why do so many teachers shy away from school leadership these days? Vic Goddard, as ever, is looking inwards for some answers...

Over the last year I have been really fortunate to be able to talk at numerous teacher-training establishments to would-be educators as they look to begin their professional journey. What has been obvious is the energy and enthusiasm that they have for the job, driven by their wish to make a difference to the lives of young people. Just recently, however, I have also been really saddened to hear friends and colleagues, who have always had the drive and determination to become head teachers, tell me that they no longer want that level of responsibility. One summed up the feelings of them all: 'I don't understand how anyone can be expected to lead in the dark!'

The statistics have been clear for a number of years, with a large percentage of head teachers reaching retirement age and no waiting throng of staff rushing to fill the positions; I feel it appropriate to point out that this is not a reflection purely on current government actions, but has been a ticking time bomb for a while now.

Accentuate the positive

I do think that part of the problem is created by us – current head teachers – with the impression being given that we have the woes of the world on our shoulders. The last few months have certainly been difficult but I feel that this is the time to stand stronger and shout louder for the children we serve and to continue to be positive about what we do.

The joy of being given the privilege to lead a school remains as fresh to me today as it did when I became head six years ago. A very good friend of mine, Dave Whitaker (head of the outstanding Springwell Special School), calls it 'impostor syndrome' – the moments when we pinch ourselves to believe that we actually deserve to be where we are and doing the important things we are charged with doing!

I have suffered 'impostor syndrome' on numerous occasions this year but have grown to realise that is exactly how I *should* feel. The level of responsibility is great but so are the personal rewards, and I don't mean in terms of salary. I currently have an ex-student of Passmores doing his GTP with us and every time I see him it makes me smile and walk a bit taller – I hear the little voice in my head say 'he's changing his future partly because of something I did'. What more reward could I wish for? If that isn't a manifestation of why I love the job, then what is?

No fear

So, what are the hurdles to headship that young teachers perceive that they have to negotiate? Well I asked some of them, and the list was quite lengthy: workload, time pressure, government targets, Ofsted, financial responsibility, loneliness of the job, difficult parents, losing the one to one contact with the students... has that sold the job to you?

I understand why all of those hurdles can make ultimate leadership seem undesirable – but the fact of the matter is that many of them are out of my control so I don't spend too much time worrying about them. When it comes to balancing workload and time pressure I look back to being a head of department – the requirements then of managing the tonnes of paper that were needed for exam entries, different audits and data tracking were actually much more stressful, due to the tight time deadlines and lack of administrative support.

The financial responsibility was my worry

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when I started the job, but has not caused as many challenges as I thought due to having much more experienced and skilled people around me to make sure I get it right – a business manager and governors to name a few. I am now in a position, six years later, to feel confident that I have a handle on that side of the work, but I still have the brilliant people around me to make sure I don't slip up!

So let us try a new list. Reasons why you *should* become a head teacher: making the biggest difference to the most young people; job satisfaction; leading a passionate team of professionals; moulding the future; contributing to improving a town/community; creating energy; being challenged creatively and academically... now, doesn't that sound better?

I honestly think that right now is the perfect time to become a head; a time when young people need us the most. The world is evolving so rapidly due to new technologies that allow for different teaching strategies to be used like at no other time, and the job market is difficult. Now is the moment to grab the agenda and to shape the future in order to direct it in a way that best supports our students – and therefore our future.

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