

THE PRINCIPALSHIP IN THE AGE OF FERMENT

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I. A NEW KIND OF FERMENT IN THE SIXTIES

America experienced many anxious moments during the last decade. It was an era when sky hijacking and heart transplanting started and became prevalent, and when man made his virgin trip to the moon. It was an era when America fought a war that no one seemed to want and very few understood, an era of inflation, air and water pollution, and sky-reaching taxation. It was an era of ghetto turmoils, campus upheavals, political assassinations, and an era when emotional slogans such as "law and order" were dramatized. It was an era when the diplomacy of confrontations became the tools of almost everybody who wanted something. It was an era when the children who grew up in the depression became the parents of teenagers who were reared in an affluent society. The decade of the '60s was an era when the first television generation of human beings went to college, and our universities and colleges have not been the same since they arrived.

From any way we look at it, the decade of the '60s was packed with astonishments, frustrations, and uncertainties. To add further chemical reaction to this age of ferment is the pre-conflict in our value system. It is conceded that in our pluralistic society there should be some disagreement among viewpoints, methods and procedures in attaining societal goals, but you will agree with me that in the course of human relationship in a relatively intelligent society there should be some acceptance of the well-established guidelines for our moral behavior - Archimedes.

A great proportion of the ferment today hinges on the questioning of values, non-acceptance of tradition, and the insistence that any position based on authority must be undergirded with scientific validation and pragmatism. No one questions the pragmatic teachings of John Dewey, but in this age of fermentation there is reason to question the rejection of puritanical morality and the emergence of values influenced by group conformity and hedonistic philosophies of life. This era of ferment is filled with violent opposition to any societal requirement or law which restrains individual enjoyment and life style. To a large extent the adult society has served as a catalyst to confrontation of our moral values and the guidelines of established conduct.

In the DuPont Plaza Park in Washington, I noticed some signs being carried by youngsters which read - "Down with the War" - "Down with the Draft" - "Down with Air and Water Pollution" - "Down with Tradition" - and "Down with Authority." I dared to go closer to view the inscriptions on helmets being worn by several of the youngsters. The inscription read - "Down with everything."

This is the era of ferment in which you as principals and I as a college administrator work.

II. HISTORY OF THE HIGH SCHOOL AND THE CHANGE OF PHILOSOPHY

Why should I address this august body about the development of changes in the philosophy of secondary education. Much of the change of emphasis in the original philosophy has increased the fermentation. You know that the high school emerged in the 1820s as an alternative to the academy in the fulfillment of the equalitarian aspirations of the ordinary individuals and the poor. There was the shift of the financial burden from the well-to-do to the right of the local government to impose tax on all citizens receiving mutual benefit from the school system. The Kalamazoo Decision rendered by the Michigan Supreme Court, 1894, established for all the principle of free tax supported secondary schools. Since

that date there has been a rapid expansion and a mix of all kinds of value systems. Of course, the late President John F. Kennedy further amplified the growing philosophy by the statement, "This is one nation. To deny educational opportunity to any American child is to undermine the national security of America."

Education for the masses and the desegregation of schools added additional compounds to the fermentation.

III. THE CHANGE IN THE JOB DESCRIPTION FOR THE HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

I can remember when the high school principal in a given community was the establishment. He had more power and influence than all the politicians in the community. Yes, you once were the head master and exerted a central leadership role. Impressive advances in medicine, astronomical scientific discoveries, engineering feats in transportation and communication, tripled with the population explosion produced problems that society could find no effective solutions. The high school principal was caught in pressures from all sides and all types of social-political and economic challenges with little or no help from the political units that paid the bill.

Thomas W. Braden, Editor-Publisher of the Blade Tribune, Oceanside, California, describes very vividly the problem;

"Americans could no longer hope that education in this country rest on tiny political subdivisions - The local school districts, the local counties and even states. The units simply cannot foot the bill." The Government was asked for aid. The principal was caught in the ferment of local units - districts and school boards refusing millions of dollars either because of pride, bigotry or sheer incompetence. Your job description changed from educational leader to a development officer, proposal writer, mediator, information specialist and, of all things, if you wanted to survive - a politician. Congratulations - some of you made it. Others of you are in my category: "You know not when the hour of change cometh."

Your role and scope have continued to change - not only being a financial wizard, but in individual rights and other legal views, drugs and their effective use, disuse or abuse (society has not decided), boys haircuts, the length of mini-skirts, the mixture of whites and non-whites in each classroom, teacher's unions, busing and even physical survival. (When you go to work, do you carry a rifle, pistol, mace or a hickory stick loaded on one end with lead?)

Then there is still the largest ingredient of the ferment which really leads me to question your job description - the problem

of diminishing returns in administration: Bigness - Bigness.

How large should your school become under your administration?

Despite present statistics on growth in school enrollment and the size of the school plant, trends indicate that the principal will face even greater problems of bigness in the future. Phasing-out will have something to do with this. Because of my hang-up on the use of this terminology I will not discuss it. It's always the Black school and its leaders that must go. All at once we the blacks have become too incompetent. The perplexity of this growth is staggering. According to the 1970 issue of the Florida School Bulletin, there are more than 72,000 teachers in Florida and each year we add more than 12,000 new teachers. So my dear friends, in this period of growth you operate in a continuum expediency.

IV. SURVIVAL IN AN ERA OF TRANSITION

In this era of ferment, the sober leadership of the principal is demanded. As you operate in a continuum of expediency, being faced daily with perplexing tasks, please do not adopt the escapist type of philosophy which is characterized by readiness to make compromises on vital issues. This is an era when moral fortitude is needed.

Permit me to suggest some gems that might be added to your storehouse if as administrators you are to survive:

1. Though you may be besieged with confrontation and conflicts, never lose sight of the needs and interest of the individual teacher or student.
2. Besieged with inestimable growth in enrollment, teaching staff, and physical facilities you still have the responsibility to provide educational leadership. This you cannot abdicate.
3. Have a heart. Possess the intestinal fortitude and make decisions that you believe to be just and honorable. Somebody in this society must take a stand.
4. Besieged by a variety of frustrations in the society, never allow yourself to become a victim of politics of fear, hatred, prejudice, and above all, selfishness.
5. You above all must be dedicated to a cause. You know that consequence is the true arbiter of truth and that the "outcome" or the "final product" is more of the real thing than the morality.
6. If you are to contribute toward the preservation of this society, you must assist in creating an atmosphere

of continuous reason and tolerance.

In conclusion, I believe that the great philosopher Alfred North Whitehead expressed in dramatic terms the great challenge for principals in this era of ferment:

"In the conditions of modern life, the rule is absolute - that race which does not value trained intelligence is doomed. Not all your heroism, not all your social charm, nor all your wit, nor all your victories on land or sea can move back the finger of fate. Tomorrow science will have moved forward one more step and there will be no appeal from the judgement which will then be pronounced on the un-educated."

In the diversity and multiplicity of challenges and pressures, your leadership must survive.