



BY DENNIS SPARKS

Leaders Speak From the Heart

That which is spoken from the heart is heard by the heart.

—Jewish saying

Emotions trump facts in motivating human behavior. That was an awareness I acquired only after many years of frustration trying to persuade others to change based on research and logical discussion. This understanding means that in addition to providing evidence to support new practices, it's important that leaders speak from their hearts to the hearts of those they lead to sustain a steady flow of energy for doing the demanding work of continuously improving teaching, learning, and relationships in schools.

When leaders fail to garner commitment to change through logical presentation based on solid evidence, they often misdiagnose the problem as recalcitrant teachers or school structures and cultures that resist change. John Kotter and Dan Cohen offer another view in *The Heart of Change: Real-Life Stories of How People Change Their Organizations*. "People change what they do," they observe, "less because they are given analysis that shifts their *thinking* than because they are shown a truth that influences their *feelings*." Because emotions underlie lasting change, leaders' ability to evoke and channel the energy that emotion creates is essential in overcoming inertia and providing the commitment necessary to establish new habits of mind and behavior.

Leaders can evoke feelings when they speak with passion about the values that guide their lives and of the values shared by the school community. They can elicit emotions by telling stories to touch the hearts of those they lead. For example, leaders touch hearts when they speak from their hearts about the incidents and events that shaped them as human beings and led them into teaching and school leadership. They can also invite others to share the influences that shaped their lives and professional choices in faculty meetings or other appropriate venues. (My next column will have more to say on leaders' use of stories.)

Another means by which leaders evoke feelings is by providing learning experiences that speak to the heart as well as the mind. The use of well-chosen poetry and video clips are two such methods. Another is to form panels of current or former students in which participants reveal salient aspects of their lives, their experiences in the school, and how well prepared they felt they were for the next phase of their lives.

It is important, of course, that leaders evoke feelings of hope and purposefulness rather than resignation and dependency. When leaders speak from their hearts to the hearts of others in ways that promote a sense of possibility and commitment to important goals and encourage others to do the same, they lead through learning.

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