

# 8 Hats: Essential Roles for School Leaders

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## Contact Information

- Website
- Email Address

If you are a school leader or aspiring to become one, I want to share eight hats you should expect to wear:

## Hat 1: Coach



Learning to make the final call...

Someone has to make the final call, and as the principal, that will often be you. Like a good coach, you will need to understand the strengths and weaknesses of your team. You will need to listen to input from others. But ultimately, you will be the one who often makes many of the final calls in your building. Coaches also set the tone, cast the vision, or help motivate their teams to action. Even if you are not a pep-talk kind of person, it is important that you are clear with direction, consistent with follow-through, and fair-minded in difficulties. Like it or not, others will look to you for direction and follow your lead. So plan to lead in a positive direction.

## Hat 2: Manager



Defining key responsibilities...

School leadership is much more than management, but it is still an important part of it. Some principals are surprised at the amount of work required for supervision, personnel decisions, report generating, budget decisions, and schedule planning. If you are transitioning from the classroom, you are now responsible for an entire school. You can't manage a school without a great team.

One way I have tried to encourage focus in office management of our school, for instance, is by putting job responsibilities in writing. Each office staff member has key responsibility areas in writing so each of us know who is managing specific tasks throughout the year.



### Hat 3: Counselor



Understanding before being understood...

Whether it is handling concerns of students, parents, teachers, or other school staff, a significant part of school leadership is learning to listen. I am not a counselor and do not pretend to be. But I have learned the importance of giving my attention to someone in need, providing them feedback, and helping them find solutions.

Sometimes people just need to be heard, and sometimes they need to be guided into finding their own solutions. My favorite Stephen Covey quote always comes into play when I talk about counseling: "Seek first to understand before seeking to be understood."

## Hat 4: On Duty



Accepting accountability...

Like it or not, everyone is accountable to someone. Just because you are a principal does not mean you are on your own. You still answer to your superiors. You still answer to authority at the local, state and federal levels. You still follow the same rules, regulations, policies, and laws your staff is expected to follow.

When you are absent for family sick leave, for instance, you fill out the same form your teachers fill out. I sign in every morning on the same sheet my teachers use for sign in. In fact, I am usually the first one to sign in.

Principals are on duty just like everyone else.

## Hat 5: Cheerleader



Being the chief communicator...

I am not sure I can emphasize enough the importance of keeping people informed. So often because you are on the front end of decisions or information coming to the school, you falsely assume others have the same information or context.

Here are a few ways I try to keep communication clear:

- a. Be present and visible.
- b. Follow up meetings with email summaries.
- c. Email parents and teachers in group emails with school updates.
- d. When someone is upset, call or see in person if possible.
- e. Send photos and updates to your local media outlets.
- f. Create a school newsletter so great events are published to a wider audience.

## Hat 6: Servant-Leader



Leading by doing your part...

One aspect I appreciate about leaders I admire the most is their ability to roll up their sleeves and lend a hand. More than once, he has been seen helping out with grounds work, standing in the serving line at faculty meals, or organizing a tailgate party on game night. Principals are not exempt from service. In fact, they should be on the frontline when it comes to helping others.

This doesn't mean you neglect the tasks of management, supervision, and meetings to do all maintenance tasks in your building. Instead, it means that at times, you will need to step in when there is a need and lend a hand. More than once, I have cleaned up the spill in the commons. Working a mop is something I can still do while wearing a tie.



## Hat 7: Team Player



Accomplishing more together...

Finally, a principal must remember he or she is not working alone.

You are surrounded by teachers, students, or staff members who are talented, intelligent and creative. And you always accomplish more when pulling with a team than by yourself. So you must not forget that you need others to be successful. And others need you too. Strong leaders do not push others. Instead, they lead and are followed.

As you set the tone for your building, remember you are doing this in partnership with others.

## Hat 8: Individual



Maintaining personal growth...

Learning to take care of others also means investing in the areas of your life beyond your school.

- Take time for your personal health.
- Keep your inner life (spiritual life or faith) a top priority.
- Invest in your family and keep ties strong.
- Make the most of breaks and vacation time to recharge your emotional batteries.
- Protect at least one day a week from work/school activities.
- Pursue talents and hobbies that enrich your life.

Your leadership will not stay effective if you are not taking care of yourself.

**Leadership is a calling...**

# Where do I need to grow?

1. Coach
2. Manager
3. Counselor
4. On-Duty
5. Cheerleader
6. Servant-Leader
7. Team-player
8. Individual



What hats will you wear?

Whether you are coaching, managing, staying accountable, communicating, serving, or working with a team, your ultimate goal is to create a safe and effective learning environment, no matter what hats you have to wear to reach that goal.

## Want to Keep Learning?

Find more resources, podcast episodes, and services for education leaders, including coaching, masterminds, and academies at [www.williamdparker.com](http://www.williamdparker.com)

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