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## Best Practices for K-12 District Level Leaders

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## Best Practices for K-12 District Level Leaders

### About the Author(s)

#### Background:

Washington is a recent graduate of Abilene Christian College doctoral program and a 25-year educator. Washington has served as schoolteacher, counselor, principal, and Director of Special programs managing federal, state and local grants. In recent years she has worked in the role of training and development in Houston, Tx. and as instructor for Beijing Concord College of Sino-Canada. Washington is owner of A Smart Consulting, a national consulting company providing support for educational institutions and corporations.

### Keywords

Information communication technology, WorkLife Balance, K-12 leaders, Recommendations

### Cover Page Footnote

The information presented here is part of my doctoral dissertation submission with Abilene Christian University. Author: Dr. Carolyn Manning-Washington



## **Best Practices for K-12 District Level Leaders: Information Communication Technology and Its Impact on Work-Life Balance for K-12 Leaders**

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### **Abstract**

In an ever-evolving time of technology in our society and, more specifically, in our schools, the need for school leaders to equip themselves as technology leaders of the 21st century. While the role of the school principal has included the need for sound instructional strategies and keen managerial styles, this role is changing quickly due to the increased access to information communication technology. Principals are finding themselves strapped with cell phones, iPads, laptops, and other technology tools to meet the ever-demanding needs of the principalship role. Therefore, school district leaders would be wise to investigate and evaluate the pulse of the school principal relative to the technology leader.

### **Introduction**

Information communication technologies (ICTs), such as smartphones and laptops (Radicati, 2014; Yelton, 2012), have become increasingly accessible in a variety of formats and for a variety of uses (Koekemoer & De Wet, 2016). Individuals use various forms of information communication technology in their personal lives and use such ICTs in their work lives (Koekemoer & De Wet, 2016; Networked Workers, 2008). From the early adoption of mobile devices, personal computers, and personal digital assistants to more widespread, competent communication devices such as laptops and smartphones, individuals are now available 24 hours a day via email, text messaging, live-stream, Facetime, and other forms of social media.

Information communication technology with devices such as smartphones and laptops has become a cross-cultural societal norm (Radicati, 2014; Yelton, 2012). Additionally, many employers provide these technologies or a stipend for employees to use their own devices,

otherwise known as "bring your device" (Guerin, 2017). However, research findings suggest that such an increase in access to ICTs has proven a disadvantage in work roles considered highly demanding or stressful (Chesley, 2014; Diaz et al., 2012; Sayah, 2013; Sungdoo, 2018).

School leadership in kindergarten through 12th grade (K-12) public schools is a highly demanding and stressful work role, with principals dealing with a significant number of pressing and overwhelming challenges (Armstrong, 2015; Bryan, 2015; Burke et al., 2012; Krzemienski, 2012); with some principals working up to 80 hours a week (Drago-Severson et al. (2018) and some even considering leaving the profession (Sogunro, 2012). School leaders are more than just administrators; they are responsible for managing the daily affairs of the school, transforming schools through vision, and routinely visiting classrooms (Harding, 2016). School leaders also manage school budgets and are physically present for meetings during the workday, after-hour board meetings, evening functions, community functions, and sometimes weekend functions, with the added responsibility of technology leaders in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Baydar, 2022).

Current literature has suggested that school leaders report using after-work time to respond to emails, complete observations, and complete reports (Oplatka, 2017). In some instances, school leaders were even asked to post on Facebook, build relationships through social media sites such as WhatsApp, and tweet about daily happenings in the schools (Capelluti & McCafferty, 2017). Given the high work demands, K-12 leaders struggle with work-life balance. Easy access to information communication technology or school district-provided ICTs may compound work-life balance, leaving leaders to find themselves having to decide between time spent on social media and time spent with family.

In a recent qualitative study of eight school principals, ages ranging from the mid-30s to late 50s, including three males and five females, 3 African American women, two African American men, one Caucasian man, and one Caucasian woman, and all from suburban school districts in Houston, Texas. Findings from this study suggested the following (a) K-12 principals feel overwhelmed in their roles because of the job demands, being available 24 hours a day through cell phone, text messages, and emails (b) K-12 principal task are highly driven by the use of technology for instructional needs, managerial needs, and social media needs, and they require much training (c) While available technology assists K-12 leaders with completed job task promptly, the study also found that access to technology was considered at times intrusive,

(d) K-12 leaders need practices or policies that will provide better work-life balance for K-12 principals.

While the above overarching finds were presented, a deeper analysis of data revealed K-12 leaders' feelings of guilt associated with not responding to text messages or phone calls and the inability to disconnect mentally when receiving an alert from a phone call or text message. Of more significant concern were the principals sharing of major health concerns and other emotional and psychological ramifications of their role. While one would agree that in school leadership, there is a tremendous amount of responsibility and demands that require a great deal from the K-12 leader, the question becomes, at what cost?

In summary, the increased accessibility to ICTs has further impacted work-life balance for K-12 leaders. School principals are now seen as technology leaders in addition to all their other responsibilities. Therefore, it would be of significant value for school districts to consider the following recommendations to sustain school principals in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (a) to train school principals in the use of technology to meet their needs better, and (b) to develop district practices that support and cultivate work-life balance.

### **Recommendations**

After studying the phenomenon of the increased accessibility of information communication technology and work-life balance of K-12 leaders using an interpretative phenomenological approach and analysis of individual participant interviews of K-12 principals, it is my recommendation that school district leadership (i.e., superintendents and school boards): routinely evaluate the needs of K-12 leaders and analyze the stressors associated with the role of the K-12 principal. Likewise, district-level leadership should also research ideas implemented in corporate entities relative to work-life balance, business-casual attire, flexible scheduling, cut-off times for text messages and emails, and policies that support balancing work and life in a highly technological age.

1. Provide training for school principals to develop their computer literacy when working with school-related technology.
2. Research, develop, and implement work-life balance policies and support through mentoring, flexible scheduling, retreats, and mental health support.

3. Provide executive coaching to principals in the first three years of the principalship to ensure principal retention, morale, and motivation.
4. Provide intensive technology-based training to support K-12 principals with the technological task associated with this role.
5. Create an environment that fosters and supports flexible work hours and attire while at the same time maintaining leader presence and professionalism.
6. Implement a no-text, no-email after a designated hour so that K-12 principals might not feel compelled to be available 24/7.
7. Create opportunities for school leaders to engage in activities that promote physical, mental, and relationship health, such as building a district gym for employees and families, providing a nutritionist or health coach, and providing ongoing reflection activities for school principals to stay attuned to their mental health.
8. Consider activities appropriate for school designees (i.e., assistant principals, instructional specialists) to attend instead of the school principal.
9. Be aware of supervisory actions, whether overtly or covertly, that send a message that K-12 leaders must be available 24 hours a day through district-provided ICTs. Actions such as sending emails after work hours and contacting campus leaders after work hours for non-emergency projects.

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