

My journey into leadership can be visually represented by the M.C. Escher work, *Relativity*. I have had many starts and stops along the way, and many interactions and relationships with my school community and environment. When I moved from the classroom to the offices, I found the experience unsettling. I was thrust from the comfort of controlling my destiny into a whirl of activity and uncertainty. The two worlds collided – and both with my personal life and beliefs. One lesson illustrated by Escher is that things do not always appear as they really are. I have spent four years moving through administrative tasks and building a repertoire of skills, yet I still find myself struggling with political and public pressures. I still search, climb, work, rise, fall, serve, rest and reflect – sometimes alone and sometimes along with or against others. Like many journeys, this one started long before I came to work in education.

I was a successful student in high school and earned good grades with little or no effort. I learned a lot on my own and was mostly curious about nature and animals. I reflect on my own high school experience and realize that regardless of the social, political, and technological challenges of public education, there is a core group of skills that students should acquire to be successful. I combine that traditional belief with my constructivist views as a basis for my educational goals and motivation in my career.

My intelligent and articulate parents were both self-educated beyond high school, pursuing only minimal amounts of post-secondary education. My father worked for Bethlehem Steel and my mother was a homemaker and worked part-time when I entered high school. Throughout my education and other pursuits, my parents emphasized their goal that I should go farther and do better than they had. The famous

Western Pennsylvania work ethic taught me that you *always* go to work and *always* do your best.

I was a marginal student in college until I found my niche in education and science. I had an extremely successful student teaching experience that reinforced my decision to work in education and gave me the confidence I needed to pursue my first professional position. While I was sure that I was in the right field, I was not so sure about my move to Central Pennsylvania. I struggled with the move from Johnstown to Chambersburg, and although I was successful in my Greencastle classroom, I was determined to make my stay a short one. I was withdrawn socially and declined invitations to participate in school activities and on faculty committees. After a successful second semester of teaching, I decided to stay with the Greencastle-Antrim School District – once I made that decision, I embraced it and got very involved in school activities. I became the Assistant Director for the Drama Club and an advisor for the Student Council, and I was involved in numerous faculty committees. Over time, I built a strong knowledge of the culture and goals of the district and realized that they were similar to goals of my own. When that alignment was realized, I excelled.

Quickly, I found myself leading discussions among faculty members and working on state and national presentations. I was often paired with more experienced faculty members so that I provided the opposite perspective, a contrast to their type-A, regimented teaching style. It didn't take long for my detail-oriented, yet laid-back style to emerge. Experienced faculty members were taking notice, and as my rookie status faded, I grew into a skilled instructor with powerful and creative classroom ideas and effective classroom management. I rarely had discipline problems with students and, in

fact, some of the least desirable students worked extremely well in my classes. I had high standards for all of my students and for myself. I felt lucky to be sheltered from their bad reputations – ironically, my classroom was the farthest from the office.

Near the end of my fourth year of teaching, Jack Appleby initiated dialogue with me via an e-mail message that simply said, “Kate – I’d like to talk professional development with you.” We talked several times about my strengths and how they suited me to move into a different role. The Dean of Students position that I currently hold was developed, and I was off on a new adventure. I enthusiastically started my administrative coursework but stopped for a time when I was unsure that I wanted to leave my interest and love for science behind. I took several courses in veterinary medicine and some geo-environmental courses but eventually returned to the Educational Administration program.

The last four years have been very insightful. I have learned about the strong qualities that I possess that make my move into leadership a natural one. When I tried to answer the initial question, I listed things about myself that I feel have helped me succeed in leadership roles. I grouped the characteristics according to personality, relationships, learning, handling issues, and goals. My personality traits include a strong work ethic, a good sense of humor, compassion for others, and an appreciation for simple things. I find that I am calm, sensible, and even-tempered; and I truly have the ability to forgive and forget. My relationships with others are based on my belief that there is value in everyone. I’m perceived as trustworthy among faculty, staff, students and parents and view every interaction as an opportunity to build trust and understanding. My concepts of learning include my belief that everyone can learn and

that I can learn from everyone. I believe in multiple intelligences and encourage students to pursue a variety of strategies and interests. I handle issues with simplicity. I'm able to dissect problems and think creatively and abstractly to solve them. My goal in education is to genuinely work to make things better and strive to adapt to the needs of the system and my community.

Although the Dean position I hold is constantly evolving, I feel luck to have had leadership elements in my position. Rather than addressing only discipline and attendance issues, I have had the opportunity to lead many special projects and supervise students in special programs. The value of that experience while under the umbrella of other leaders is incredible. I have had the confidence to stretch my potential within the relative safety of our leadership team.

I have recently decided not to pursue the assistant principal position that has come open in my building. I've based my decision on many factors, but mainly because I see myself, in our current system, having the freedom (politically and personally) to lead more effectively with my strongest skills from the dean position. I realized that I am not yet prepared to separate myself from students and faculty and am comfortable thriving in a role that is most similar to a "non-commissioned officer." I realize that my definition of successful leadership does not mean rising to the top position but rather applying my best talents, skills and abilities where they will make the most significant contribution.