



Improving life and leadership of assistant principals

Assistant Principal Podcast Content Episode Outline

Show title and release date: What's your problem? December 6, 2022

Show Description:

What do (a) too many discipline referrals, (b) a poor teacher, and (c) an overflowing car line have in common? The answer is not that they are all problems. In fact, they are all symptoms. And they are all things that plenty of people will have stock answers for. Put them in ISS, put them on an action plan, redo your parking lot.

And if we are stuck in urgent mode, we might be tempted to jump at these stock answers because acting is better than doing nothing and because it seems like the answers will fix the issue. Unfortunately, the answers only address the symptom, and, in each case (discipline, teaching, car lines) if we don't invest in identifying the problem, our actions may be wasted.

Show Intro

Hello colleagues and welcome to the Assistant Principal Podcast. I'm your host Frederick Buskey. The goal of this podcast is to help improve the life and leadership of assistant principals. This is a content-focused episode. The content will stand on its own, but we take deeper dives into podcast topics in our micro-journal, Quadrant2. Members of our APEx Community can expect to get support on implementing the ideas we are looking at and adapting them to your unique context. You can learn more about APEx and Quadrant2 at frederickbuskey.com/theassistantprincipal.

Celebrations:

Being out in schools with teachers, instructional coaches, principals and, of course, assistant principals.

The Big Idea

Strategic leadership four principles: problems

Saw this conversation:

- MS Discipline struggles
- [The office is a revolving door of behaviors. Some are major... others are minor issues that staff struggle to address on their own. I'm looking for help to increase student positive behavior and staff capacity with dealing with tricky students.](#)
- Myriad of suggestions (114 comments):
- [provided our staff with a list of teacher managed behaviors as compared to office manages behaviors](#)

- Identify teachers who are effective at handling behaviors. Reach out to them to see if they are interested in conducting Pd.
- invite those who are effective into a think tank where you all discuss what makes them effective and devise a long range plan to shift the culture.
- We had grade level behavior coordinators
- Staff needs to be empowered.
- Form a group of staff to start to look at referral data and develop a plan of action together.

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All good ideas, but people are offering suggestions without knowing what the problem is.

Too many referrals is a symptom. What's the problem?

Why we treat symptoms

- Urgent zone
- Urgent Algorithm: pain point, history, quickly or bigly (examples: PBIS, staff development, hammer the kids)
- Pain is a symptom, not the problem

How to stop treating symptoms

- Ask why. Stop and ask why. Ask yourself, ask others.
 - Why is this a problem (maybe it isn't)
 - Why is this happening?
 - Why is this happening now?
 - Why is the student acting this way?
 - Why is the teacher acting this way?
 - Why are YOU behaving this way?
- Stop reacting and become intentional

How to uncover problems

- Three processes:
 - Informal: Run through options in my head (minor or simple;)
 - Semi-formal: Run through options with someone else/write down the options
 - Formal: Strategic action cycle, stakeholders, focused attention (complex and critical): Strategic action cycle
- Informal: minor things (why is third lunch moving through the food line more slowly than the other lunches?)
- Semi-formal: Increase in student absences
- Formal: We are swamped with discipline

Prep

1. Collect and examine your data
2. Think about the 6 dimensions and issues of misalignment
3. Remember that $M=V/E$
4. May be more than one problem!
5. Stakeholders

Why

1. Sunburst [head, paper, poster]: why, why, why (don't sensor)
2. Interrogate each why [why, I wonder, yes but, aha]
3. Integrate [connections, themes, areas of promise, loops]

Simple: why

Complex: Sunburst, interrogate, integrate

Discipline: (each one may have a different why) 100 referrals

- A student (10)
- A particular group of students (15)
- A teacher (25)
- A group of teachers
- A hallway and lack of oversight during transition (10)
- Too many students in the bathroom (15)
- Others... (25)

SAC: apply leverage: $0>1$, A-B, MVP, $M=V/E$

I'm not sure how this will play on a podcast – would love to get some feedback from you – too deep, more like this – please help me make this show better.

Do think it is better with visual, so Q2 subscribers will get pieces to support the process as well as a link to a video where I break down an example. APEx members we can do this together in a group coaching session. To subscribe to Q2, go to <https://www.frederickbuskey.com/quadrant2>. To join APEx go to <https://www.frederickbuskey.com/apexlaunchlive.html>, or if you would like a special offer, email me and ask about joining APEx as a founding member.

Show Outro

That wraps up today's episode. We'll be back next week with Maria Werner. Maria is a third-year assistant principal and APEx member and we are going to unpack her journey from being stuck in the black hole of urgency during her first year, to being strategically reactive her



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second year, to being a strategic leader this year. Maria is full of passion and so authentic, you won't want to miss this episode!

If you enjoyed today's show, please subscribe and rate this podcast.

You can ask questions, make requests and give us feedback at frederick@frederickbuskey.com.

Remember to head to my website to subscribe to Q2 if you haven't already and you'll get some great resources to help you shift from treating symptoms to uncovering problems. You can find a subscription link at <https://www.frederickbuskey.com/quadrant2.html>

And if you are interested in joining APEX, email me at frederick@frederickbuskey.com and ask about becoming a founding member, which comes with some great perks, like a one-on-one call with me.

That wraps up today's show! I'm Frederick Buskey and I hope you'll join me next time for the Assistant Principal Podcast.