

## Because I Said So!



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Like many of you reading this column, I suspect you can recall from your childhood those times when you requested permission from your parents to partake in an activity only to be denied. The conversation in my household went something like this when I was a kid.

Young Vern: "Can I go to Mark's house to play?"

Vern's Dad: "No!"

Young Vern: "Why not?"

Vern's Dad: "Because I said so!"

The exchange was short, sweet, and to the point. My father's response—especially his rationale for why he denied my request—did little to appease me in those days. I suspect every child who has been involved in a similar dialogue would feel likewise. However, what amazes me today in my adult years is how many leaders adopt a similar tactic when dealing with staff.

"Because I said so" is an authoritative approach to leadership. It is a style of leadership that was modelled for many of us in our younger years; unfortunately, it is an approach that still lingers today. Top-down decision-making and mandates—telling people what to do—are actually counter-productive. They create resistance, short term compliance, and creative insubordination. In a day of rapid change and innovation, such an approach to leadership is simply ineffective. "Top-down change doesn't work" (Fullan, page 35). "Because I said so" just doesn't cut it in an age of educational reform.

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A shift in leadership style is essential today from authoritative and coercive to democratic and participative. This shift is not unique to education; corporate America made this transition long before education. "Business has been moving for many years—and it will continue to do so—from a posture and a practice of management through power to a process of leadership through persuasion" (DePree, pages 21-22). The business realm refers to this style of leadership as participative management or consultative management. In education, we call this instructional leadership and creating professional learning communities.

So how do we make this change? For many (if not all of us), we did not have the skills sets necessary for instructional leadership developed during our administrator preparation programs. We know as leaders WHAT we are supposed to do; we simply don't know HOW. How do we develop a collaborative spirit among our staff? How do we build relationships among faculty members? How do we involve others in decision-making? The answer lies in purposefully orchestrated peer interaction.

Effective dialogue is powerful, and the benefits are astonishing. "When (dialogue) is done well...long-standing stereotypes can be dissolved, mistrust overcome, and visions shaped and grounded in a shared sense of purpose" (London). Structuring interaction so that peers dialogue with one another is a critical skill set for instructional leaders. Kagan Structures enable you to engage all staff in conversations that shape climate, enhance professional growth, and develop a shared sense of purpose. Consider the illustration below which demonstrates how Kagan Structures can be utilized to promote staff dialogue.

	<b>Team Interview</b>	<b>Paraphrase Passport</b>	<b>Placemat Consensus</b>
<b>Sample Content</b>	"Generate questions to learn more about your colleagues."	"How have students benefitted from our cooperative learning initiative?"	"What should we include in our vision statement on this issue?"
<b>Potential Benefit</b>	Relational trust is heightened on the team as staff members learn more about each other's lives outside of education.	Staff gain respect for peers—even if they disagree—by proving they are genuinely listening to and processing their partner's ideas.	Staff perceive others as having integrity when they demonstrate to one another their commitment to the welfare of children as a primary concern.

Are there ever times when a leader needs to function in an autocratic manner? Certainly—I would be foolish to think otherwise. However, there is a monumental difference between being authoritative situationally and being autocratic as a general rule of thumb. "Because I said so" did not resonate well with us as kids and it clearly is not received well by staff. Purposefully orchestrated peer interaction—engaging your staff in deep, rich, meaningful dialogue—is how administrators in the 21st century behave and lead.

**References**

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