



District
Management
Group

10 MISTAKES TO AVOID

Activating Entrepreneurial Leadership in Education

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Activating Entrepreneurial Leadership in Education

To activate entrepreneurial leadership in public school districts, leaders need to take deliberate steps to cultivate skills and nurture a conducive environment. Here is a reminder of some common pitfalls to avoid.

1 Don't let the urgent allow you to lose sight of opportunities.

Entrepreneurial leaders are constantly exposing themselves to new ideas. While managing your district can be all-consuming, remember to make time to expose yourself to breakthrough ideas. Encourage your team members to do so as well.

2 Don't forget that the staff collectively may have the solution.

To address the most pressing challenges in your district, bring together a range of talented people from the district to generate solutions. Use structured approaches to get the most out of this time, and leverage "kaleidoscope thinking."

3 Don't feel restricted to ideas within the education sector.

Be open to drawing inspiration from other industries. While the public education sector has much that is unique to it, practices from the private and government sectors and the latest research in academia may hold inspiration applicable to your district.

4 Don't stop talking about the district vision.

For people to act entrepreneurially, they must truly understand the vision for the district. Communicate the vision with frequency, and tie your decisions and actions back to the district vision as often as possible.

Don't sink too much time into converting adversaries.

For any change effort, there will always be naysayers who will be difficult to win over. Invest your time in energizing the people on the fence to create a larger group of advocates. Don't get drawn into time-consuming battles with the opposition.

Don't lose focus and appear to shift priorities.

When priorities are perceived to shift at the district level, principals and teachers can be left in the lurch. If you want staff to take initiative and create new solutions to key problems, the district must maintain consistent strategic direction and focus.

Don't wait a year to see results.

Too many change efforts in school districts presume that results will take years to materialize. Set meaningful short-term goals for your teams; this will allow them to see that their work is making a difference and will help sustain momentum.

Don't forget to celebrate successes.

Leaders often fail to stop and celebrate successes—they may shy away from celebrations or simply feel they don't have the time. Don't forget this powerful and low-cost tool that allows you to demonstrate your support and appreciation, and helps you reinforce desired behaviors.

Don't leave the early wins to chance.

Once you set a short timeframe for results, stay involved to ensure the team has the necessary support, sense of urgency, and access to leadership to be successful. Investing time to help teams achieve success early on will pay off and motivate them to carry the work forward on their own.

Don't assume that innovation and entrepreneurship come naturally.

The public education sector does not have a history of encouraging innovation, so to create an entrepreneurial culture, deliberate steps need to be taken to cultivate skills and to foster an environment that values creativity and encourages risk-taking.