

What do Head Teachers do that leads to everyday greatness.



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There has been much research over the years about what makes greatness in schools. Unfortunately, until the powers that be finally settle a while on what they think a great school is, there will continue to be confusion.

At the moment, the inspectorate's versions of greatness may well be very different from the views of pupils, staff, employers and an endless list of others. So, we hear time and time again of teachers who simply don't know what is expected of them. This has caused untold problems and is, among other things, leading to a crisis in recruitment and retention.

Clearly, it is unlikely you will see everyday greatness in a school (or any profession) where recruitment and retention are at crisis point. Poor leadership and management, (along with lack of job satisfaction and workload, among other things) are factors cited in the recent review 'Education's retention crisis: Why do teachers leave', June 2018

- Job satisfaction.
- Flexible working.
- Teacher's workload.

Sadly, even leaders are now saying they are unsure of what is expected, such is the confusion caused by change and lack of clarity from the government about what they want schools to achieve. Worse still, there is conflict between what the government are offering to try to stem the problems around workload, and some academy inspection teams who remain either unwilling to implement these initiatives or are unaware of their existence.

When observing a truly inspirational lesson, it is not possible to account for its greatness using a tick list. An

outstanding piece of teaching is way beyond this. It's in the air. It's in the atmosphere. It's intangible. It has a subtlety that screams at you in an oxymorphic way that is extremely difficult to describe. So, in the search to identify what it is that school leaders do that leads to everyday greatness, we are faced with challenges.

It is these intangibles that have most impact and they are not confined to great leadership in schools. There is a whole world out there using similar processes and where great leaders following the same instincts are achieving success in their own fields. Education has a lot to learn from industry and business about how we can achieve job satisfaction for our teachers, generate enthusiasm for our 'product', develop faith in the process and build confidence and trust in our school and government leaders.

However, it is not just 'what' is done, but the way it is done that turns the good into the truly great.

When writing about what makes school leaders successful, Jeremy Sutcliffe in his book, '8 Qualities of Successful School Leaders; the desert island challenge' (published by Bloomsbury), refers not to skills or knowledge but less tangible things that although easy to name – Vision, Courage, Passion, Emotional intelligence, Judgement, Resilience, Persuasion and Curiosity – are not so easy to define.

I wholeheartedly support Sutcliffe's conclusions, though even the greatest and most inspirational leaders must still have processes to follow. What makes things really great is that these leaders do such things instinctively, perhaps

unknowingly. To the observer, this is like comparing a paint-by-numbers kit that's created a well-executed, recognisable picture of a horse or a mountain to scale and with all colours correct with the work of a master such as Stubbs or Bierstadt whose outstanding works result from breaking and bending the rules.

Over the years, I have observed school leaders and noted what it is the best of them do that leads to everyday greatness in their schools. Up to a point, I have been able to identify those things that make a difference, which I have listed below. Although I am quite sure these are replicated elsewhere many times over, what isn't always appreciated is the added ingredient that makes the great inspirational, a subtleness that screams at you when you enter a school, and which tells you that you are about to experience something very special indeed.

13 things head teachers do that lead to everyday greatness.

1. They recognise and understand great teaching and learning when they see it. They have the ability to see this in its pure form rather than ticking a list of what to look for and coming up with a robotic score. They then ensure that the teachers concerned know their professional skill has been recognised and valued.
2. They recruit great teachers and work tirelessly to ensure these teachers retain their greatness by not allowing it to be drained away by the drudgery of pointless everyday tasks.
3. Great head teachers do not assume everyone has the knowledge and skill they themselves have gathered over the years. Nor do they assume they possess all the knowledge and skills of their staff. So, not only are they wired to skilfully share knowledge but also continue to learn enthusiastically from others themselves.
4. They harvest the skills, knowledge and potential of all their staff and know that the most precious gems are often hidden. So, they are always on the lookout for undiscovered talent and ensure that those people are

given the opportunity and support to use their gifts and share their valuable expertise among their colleagues, regardless of their position on the leadership ladder.

5. Great head teachers accept and actively pursue their responsibility to nurture, develop and clear the pathway of opportunity for the next generation of school leaders, even though this may lead to the loss of their best talent through promotion elsewhere.
6. Great heads have both the ability to identify and the courage to filter out educational fads and fanciful rubbish that overburden schools before being discredited or falling out of favour and ending up discarded.
7. Rather than seeing them as a threat, great head teachers give thanks for those 1 in a 100 teachers that sometimes come their way and make the best possible use of such a gift.
8. Great head teachers remain steadfast and maintain staff confidence when the going gets tough during stressful periods, such as change.
9. They instinctively feel any rising pressure or temperature in their schools and act to reduce it before things become unmanageable.
10. Great heads respect other's time and don't waste it. They know that extra work or commitments must be carefully time managed. Above all, they protect the work-life balance of their staff.
11. Great heads step up and accept responsibility if things go wrong and when it's time to celebrate they step out of the limelight.
12. Great heads know how to communicate their school's vision and aims clearly, ensuring everyone (pupils, staff, parents and the wider community) understands.
13. Great heads know when to speak and when to listen.

Excellence does not happen by chance. It grows from knowledge, experience and the determination of the whole team to succeed. But within this team is a leader who has instinctively shown they have those vital eight qualities to lead others, individually and as a whole, to everyday greatness.

Judith Green's bio in brief:

Judith's highly successful career has encompassed primary teaching, leadership and management and taken her from small village school through to some of Britain's most needy and demanding urban educational environments. Actively working alongside HMI and OFSTED, she helps support schools as they look to raise their standards during what can sometimes be very difficult self-improvement journeys. A strong feature of Judith's leadership is not just her ability to keep abreast of the most cutting edge educational ideas, but the way she is able to sift the truly innovative idea from just the fad. She believes every child deserves the very best education possible and that it is the responsibility of teachers and school leaders to deliver this, a philosophy that is very much reflected in her coaching and mentoring methods. Now Judith is taking on a new challenge as the founding headteacher of an entirely new British international school of some 800 pupils. Under her leadership, the school has already become a vibrant and outstanding example of academic, pastoral and vocational excellence.

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