

Leadership Interview Paper

Janna Kasmanian

Pepperdine University

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“Ever she sought the best, ever she found it (Livingston, 2013),” quoted Dr. Cynthia Livingston, eyes filled with tears as she answered the last question of what she would want her legacy to be. Dr. Livingston would want everyone to remember her as a person of goodness and love for people, for life. Cynthia has done a remarkable job in dynamically shifting our school culture, as everyone loves her. This is the third year Cynthia has led Rosemont Middle School of La Crescenta and within those short years, narrowed the focus and moved in baby steps to significantly impact the staff of Rosemont in a positive, compassionate manner.

Cynthia Livingston is one of the most energetic, positive, supportive, happy, passionate, loving and caring leaders I have ever met. I believe this is partly due to her Elementary school background as Rosemont is her first experience at the secondary level. Although she was always scared to come to the secondary level, she now wished she made the transition earlier. Cynthia loves, loves and loves children. Soon after the bell rings, you will hear Dr. Livingston making the daily announcement, followed by a reminder to the students of the Livingston Laws, “to keep your hands and feet to yourself and whatever comes out of your mouth, must be nice (Livingston, 2013),” and ending it with her famous saying to, “make it a great day or not, the choice is yours (Livingston, 2013).” You will find Cynthia all smiles, with her big, yellow, “Expect Success,” button on her stylish outfit in the halls during passing period, snack and lunch talking to the students or in the classrooms supporting teachers and learning. Not only do the students love her, but so do the staff and community members who embrace her as the principal of 1400 plus pre-teens. She is a caring, nurturing people-person who loves to build relationships and be social. She loves life and sees only the best in

everyone she comes across. You will never find yourself in a conflict with Cynthia because she hates it and she turns this weakness into a strength acting as a peacemaker amongst our very divided staff.

Upon Cynthia's arrival to our school, we had faced two extreme leaders and a staff that was divided, hurt, angry and resentful of one another. At that point, even though I had only been teaching three years, I was looking for other jobs and possibly a different career. I told myself to give this new leader a try before I quit teaching. At our first faculty meeting, I instantly fell in love with her. She was genuine and real. Her priorities were straight with mine, students first! I showed her my best and she gave me all the support, fighting my battles against the teachers and AP's who didn't want to see me succeed. Through her love, attention and support, she won my trust and I wanted to do everything to please her. I was so glad I didn't quit teaching. This is how many of the teachers felt and we now share our similar experiences and laugh. Although Cynthia feels that we still have a lot of work to do to build the morale of the school, it has definitely come a long way. But, that's not what keeps her awake at night anymore; the challenge she faces is making sure that her students are alive and happy. The communities of La Crescenta/La Canada have been facing a suicide crisis amongst their teenagers of the affluent community. This year we not only have suicidal students, but pre-teen girls who are cutting themselves. I believe that Cynthia is successful at solving these problems at our school because she is a Blue (Pace Palette, 1995) Woo (Rath, 2007) who has made community connections, parent connections and student connections. She also deals with her stressors by spending time with family and friends, going out and enjoying the wonders of life. Cynthia is a great leader, but not the best

manager and that is why she has her two AP's (a green and a yellow) who do this for her. To be a successful leader one must have a clear vision, be persistent and patient. She also said that if I were to assume a principal position, I must understand that it is the hardest job I will ever do, its impossible, so I must do the best that I can, always staying true to my vision and mission.

During our hour and half interview, I laughed, cried and learned. The reason I chose to do this assignment and chose to interview her was because I see myself in her. Cynthia is like the older, wiser and confident school leader I want to be. I recognize a lot of traits in her that I have. She acknowledges her staff members strengths by giving them leadership roles and delegating tasks. Her leadership style and the warm, welcoming school culture she is creating is what I want my future charter school to look like. Beyond being my principal, Cynthia is my friend. I can openly talk to her about anything and get the best advice. This is because she believes in creating a culture of family amongst the staff where everyone can love and appreciate one another. The way she does this is by first developing trust by listening, supporting and guiding the teachers. Then, she tries to mend broken relationship or negate opinions by creating circumstances to make that teacher shine, so that other members of the staff value them. Building relationships one at a time, she builds morale and eventually builds our school culture.

This interview validated my feelings and thoughts of what a successful leader of a school should be like. I left feeling confident that I do have the qualities and traits of a successful leader. I understood that it is a lot of work and even though in my eyes Cynthia is an exceptional leader, she was humble about the work that she does. She

exposed her insecurities and weaknesses, which made me, see how real and raw she was, that she was human. I was amazed at how she holds herself accountable and is always analyzing, reflecting and criticizing the work she does. I appreciated her honesty and her sincere, kind words. I have taken so much from this interview, from the past three years led by her. She wanted me to know that no matter the journey I took, she will support me in the chapters to come to my life; my eyes were filled with tears as I left her office.

Biography of Cynthia Livingston

Cynthia Livingston graduated from San Diego State University in 1979 earning her Bachelor of Arts in Liberal Studies and started her educational career with Capistrano Unified School District. In 1985 she earned her Masters Degree in Education from United State International University and later in 1993 decided to get her Masters in Educational Management from University of La Verne. Cynthia has been Instructional Skills Trainer, Mentor Teacher, Field Work Supervisor, Inter Teacher Coordinator and Program Quality Reviewer on top of being an Elementary School Teacher for grades two to six from 1979 to 1988. She entered Glendale Unified School District as a fourth grade teacher in 1989 to 1991 and then became an ESL Teacher Specialist from 1991 to 1994 to then becoming an Assistant Principal from 1994 to 1997. She then decided to earn her Doctorate in Education from USC in 1997 as she assumed a principal position at Fremont Elementary in La Crescenta. She served the Fremont students from 1997 to 2010 before joining Rosemont Middle School in 2010.

References

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- Rath, T. (2007). *Strengths finder 2.0*. New York, NY: Gallup, Inc.