



BY DENNIS SPARKS

Cultivating Clarity of Purpose

You will bring into your life whatever you have the most clarity about. The trouble is, most people have a great deal of clarity about what it is they don't want.

— Susan Scott

Leaders who are clear about what they want in their personal and professional lives bring a more effective voice to their interactions and are happier and more effective in their work. Educational leaders who know what they want for their schools, and who can express it clearly and concretely in the spirit of mutual learning and influence, promote clarity of school goals and focus organizational energy.

A *New York Times* article on “life lists” (“10 Things to Do Before This Article Is Finished,” August 28, 2007) stimulated my thinking about the value of purpose and intentionality. A life list, the article said, is an enumeration of goals that provides “a roadmap for your life.” In addition, “people are happiest when making progress toward clear-cut goals,” according to a psychologist cited in the article.

Because I know that I am happiest and most productive when working toward such goals, I visited www.43things.com, a website on life lists mentioned in the article. The website noted that “people have known for years that making a list of goals is the best way to achieve them. Why is that? First, getting your

goals in writing can help you clarify what you really want to do.” 43 Things offers suggestions on choosing achievable goals, some of which may be valuable to leaders as they strive for clarity of purpose at work and in their personal lives and seek a better balance between them. The website recommends:

- Including goals that are both ambitious and silly, personal, and world-improving.
- Making the list manageable. With a nod to its name, 43 Things suggests that an ideal list has somewhere between 20 and 43 items.
- Resisting over-planning for the achievement of goals before initiating action. “Most goals,” 43 Things claims, “don’t need a list of next actions, progress meters, line graphs, and customizable excel spreadsheets. Really! The sign of an achievable goal is that it wants to be worked on immediately.”
- Reviewing your list at least weekly and talking to friends about it, because “real accountability and a surprising amount of support comes from simply talking about your goals in social settings.”

Leaders who are clear about what they want for their schools, and who encourage that same clarity in others, lead through learning.

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