GATHER INFORMATION

In seeking the truth, you have to get both sides of the story.

—Walter Cronkite

Did They Really Put a Litter Box in the Bathroom at School?

In a recent conversation with a friend, we were astonished to hear this young mom lamenting about a newscast she heard that reported a local school district was placing litter boxes in bathrooms for students who identify as cats. This normally well-informed, thoughtful parent said her neighbors and friends on social media were considering pulling their kids out of public schools because, "Schools have gone too far with things like encouraging 'furries.'" We tried to keep a straight face as we offered to do some investigating and get back to her.

Imagine our surprise when we explored this outrageous claim and found it was not isolated to the accused district in Texas. The *New York Times* (Paz, 2022) reports the same allegation was made against Michigan's Midland Public School District. School districts in Iowa, Michigan, and Nebraska have been similarly charged. In none of these areas has the issue of litter boxes been considered or even entertained as a possibility by school boards or administrators.

> *The news and truth are not the same thing.*
>
> —Walter Lippmann

Of course, the erroneous report of kitty litter boxes in bathrooms is just one example of untrue allegations that inundate school and district communities and undermine the constructive work of educators and leaders. It is imperative that both institutions and individuals strive to find truth before making assumptions. That's not easy with the quick availability of misleading data and the timeless power of gossip.

> *Nothing travels faster than the speed of light with the possible exception of bad news, which obeys its own special laws.*
>
> —Douglas Adams

Believing that genuineness is a cornerstone to optimism, we created our first principal for deliberate optimism; 1. Before acting or *reacting*, gather as much information from as many perspectives as possible. In short, gather information. Soon we came up with three more principles. All four principles and an accompanying worksheet can be found in Appendix 1.1 and 1.2.

Principle #1: Gather Information

Perhaps because of the overscheduled, crazy busy lives most of us educators lead, we sometimes rely on others to articulate critical issues impacting our lives. We listen to our preferred news outlet with a naïve belief that it is imparting unbiased facts to us rather than trying to create or spin a story to increase ratings. Instead of reading actual bills or proposals, we receive information about the latest legislative mandate filtered through second-, third-, and fourth-party sources who have their own agendas. And we listen to the one person who actually attended the marathon school board meeting (other than the required participants) and forget that they, too, may be less than objective in the way they saw and report on things that happened.

Someone in the faculty lounge announces, "Well, you are never going to believe what happened at the illustrious school board meeting last night. They are cutting all our health benefits because the superintendent is throwing our district's health insurance to his wife's brother who works for Health-Issues-R-Us!" (Collective gasp.) The informant goes on, "Yes, and that's a fact! My husband and I were there. My Elton had put in a competing bid, which was a far better deal, but they didn't even give his company a chance. As usual, they didn't even try to be fair, and now we're all going to be left with the worst coverage ever. I am so sick and tired of how

we are treated in this district. Next thing you know, they'll have the coaches giving us our annual physicals to save on healthcare costs!" Those present are alarmed and begin offering their equally uninformed views and assumptions, painting the worst-case scenarios and generally working themselves into a doom-laden fit about how **They** are always picking on **Us**. What a way to start the day, right?

Or someone returns from a district workshop with the news, "Get ready folks because **They** are completely doing away with cooperative learning!" A lady in my group told me that her cousin's daughter, who is a teacher, said her principal mentioned that he heard it from a reliable source. "**They** are going to prohibit the use of cooperative learning in all core disciplines. It's true! From now on, we won't be allowed to let students work in groups. Can you believe that? Oh my gosh, I don't know what **They** are thinking! I cannot give up my groups. That's the only way I have ever taught. **Those people** are crazy. Most of them haven't been in a classroom in 30 years, and now **They** want to tell **Us** how to teach? I don't think so. That's the last straw for me. I'm going to turn in my resignation, buy a pair of skates, and go be a carhop for Sonic." And the word spreads like head lice. By the end of the day, everyone in your school is preoccupied with the new mandate (which of course, turns out to be completely untrue).

Throughout the book, we talk more about how to avoid this kind of negativism and provide ideas for better choices than just blindly following along or chiming in when problems occur. For now, we want to highlight the point that each of us needs to make every effort to collect accurate information before we react to or act on hearsay.

We're not saying that schools, districts, states, and the federal Department of Education give every issue impartial treatment or that the decisions they make are always fair or even sensible. But we know from experience that it is vital for each of us involved to know as much as possible about impending issues. We need to be aware, realistic, and as informed as possible.

When trying to find authentic answers, we encourage educators to go as directly to the source as possible. If the proper link in the chain of command does not provide precise information, go to the next higher level and keep asking until you get a definitive answer. Consider possible biases and personal agendas of others that sometimes consciously or unconsciously skew information they present. Get as many objective responses as possible, and use your inner compass to navigate a path to the most likely truth.

In the case of the litter box dilemma, one simple phone call to the district's superintendent would have neutralized at least that one

false claim. Without any sort of fact-checking, one concerned mom in Michigan made a public proclamation at an open school board meeting that this "nationwide" issue was part of a nefarious issue being pushed upon unwilling communities. She said, "I'm all for creativity and imagination, but when someone lives in a fantasy world and expects other people to go along with it, I have a problem with that" (Paz, 2022). Unfortunately, no one at the meeting responded to her disquieting statements, and a video of her histrionics went viral on social media.

When the matter finally reached the superintendent's attention, he immediately responded with, "It is such a source of disappointment that I felt the necessity to communicate this message to you. . . . Let me be clear in this communication, there is no truth whatsoever to this false statement/accusation! There have never been litter boxes within MPS schools." He went on to urge parents to contact him if rumors like this surfaced again. Problem solved. (We hope.)

The point of discussing the kitty litter box story is to emphasize the need for leaders and educators to be vigilant in not only seeking but also providing accurate information. We wonder why the officials in the MPS boardroom did not pause the parent's address to ask for a fact check. Too many times, our silence is perceived as agreement. In our current contentious, divisive atmosphere we must speak up with honesty and with facts.

Action Step 1.1

FACT CHECK

Scan QR Code 1.1 to watch this MediaWise video featuring a teen fact checker who investigates the litter box controversy. Think about how your school or district could do something like this to help diffuse erroneous rumors, gossip, and assumptions.

With intentionality, we need to help quiet the hyperactive beehive mindset surrounding our schools. School administrator, Gaskell (2022), talks about his already pandemic-stressed school community being overwhelmed by a "toxic groupthink" stemming from news about increasing school tragedies. His answer is to try to override parents' emotionally charged spontaneous reactions with logic and practical thinking, "Students have a far lower chance of being harmed in school than almost any other risk they face including traveling to and from school, catching a potentially deadly disease, and suffering from a life-threatening injury through interscholastic sports."

Gaskell believes in a proactive approach that teaches both parents and students how to get better at filtering information they find online. He recommends assisting students and families in managing constant distractions from alarming new cycles. He regularly discusses with students and parents valid methods by which they can guard against getting caught up in media frenzy and become discerning evaluators of information from every source.

We think it is additionally beneficial to be candid about the harm caused to all by unconfirmed accusations, idol gossip, and self-serving agitation. Schools should shine a spotlight on misinformation and provide a space where parents, teachers, students, leaders, and other community members can find up-to-date factual information.

Fear of the unknown, constant threat warnings, and negative "hives" promote pessimism, loss of self-efficacy, and hopelessness in each of us. Having trustworthy sources for data contributes to overall realistic optimism. Educators and leaders need to both seek clarity for themselves and take an active role in providing the tools others need to make informed decisions. Our goal is to pursue a realistic awareness toward what is happening around us.

Guiding Questions on Realistic Awareness

Before we buy into or begin reacting to what is being disseminated as *the truth*, it is our responsibility to ask ourselves some guiding questions:

1. Who exactly is "**They**?" Are we talking about a person, a committee, a voting body, or some other entity? It's important to know exactly who is responsible for the alleged decision.

2. Have I done my own research/fact checking on the current education issue or topic?

3. Have I sought out and listened to at least two sides of the issue or topic?

4. Have I relied on the words of others to help form my opinion? If so, have I considered their possible biases and credibility?

5. Have I tried to separate the facts from my preconceptions about those who made the decision (including attributing motives based on my assumptions)?

6. Was there an opportunity for me or for other affected parties to voice our opinions about the matter before a decision was made?

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7. Are we as a staff waiting to react or are we looking to begin a proactive approach to the problem?

8. Have we looked closely at the data used to support the new mandate?

9. Have we made an effort to contact similar schools or districts that have already implemented this program?

10. Have we as a staff dissected the full potential impact (pros and cons) on ourselves, our school, our community, and most importantly, our students?

Reviewing and reflecting on these questions might take time, but in the long run, the process will encourage helpful deliberations and perhaps influence those around us to think carefully before drawing conclusions. A worksheet for this purpose is provided in Appendix 1.3.

Filtering Our Perception of Others' Motives

Principle #1 suggests that before making a judgment about anything, we gather as much information from as many varied sources as possible. Sometimes our view of human behavior is erroneously flawed by the way we interpret the motives of others. It is never a good idea to assume that we know explicitly why another person acts as they do. The way humans accommodate and assimilate the world around them is highly influenced by their personal learning and thinking style. We need to consider our own tendencies as well as develop an awareness for those who respond to their environment in ways that can be totally different from ours.

Action Step 1.2

WHAT IS YOUR MIND STYLE?

Before you begin the next section, it would be helpful to take the Mind Styles Test. Scan QR Code 1.2.

Education is a people business. Daily, we interact not only with our students but also with colleagues, administrators, support staff, parents, and a myriad of adults who are invested in the business

of school. To maintain our optimism, we must figure out a way to consider the daunting opinions and behaviors of others through an objective lens. Gathering information entails taking the time to understand the positions and approaches of others. A good place to start is to understand the learning styles of those with whom we need to connect.

In our experience, we have found that seemingly off-putting behavior is sometimes most notable when groups are trying to implement change. Unfortunately, some people adhere to the *I don't mind change as long as I don't have to do anything differently* credo. But is that really what they truly mean? If we look a little deeper, could it be that they are basically trying to accommodate new policies and new procedures in a way that best suits their inherent styles? Perhaps they are not trying so much to "rain on our parades" as to deal with challenges in the best way they know how.

Gregorc's Four Mind Styles

Dr. Gregorc (1984), author of the *Mind Styles Model*, is a phenomenological researcher and author who studies the different ways people best acquire and assimilate new information. His belief is that people inherently differ in the manner they approach problem solving and the ways they make sense of their environments. He writes, "It appears that dispositions for interacting with the world in specific ways are inborn." His longstanding investigation into thinking styles has led to some interesting thoughts. Perhaps the behavior that outsiders perceive as antisocial, fussy, compulsive, flighty, frivolous, and the like are just compensatory ways that certain people make sense of their worlds. Maybe if we better understood the needs of people with different thinking styles, we could start to see that they are not trying to go against us or to be difficult but rather they are doing what comes naturally to them when coping with life.

Dr. Gregorc believes the mind works on a **perceptual** level and on an **ordering** level. Perceptual qualities generally lean toward concrete or abstract.

> *Concrete:* This quality enables you to register information directly through your five senses: sight, smell, touch, taste, and hearing. When you are using your concrete ability, you are dealing with the obvious, the "here and now." You are not looking for hidden meanings or making relationships between ideas or concepts. "It is what it is."

> *Abstract:* This quality allows you to visualize, to conceive ideas, to understand or believe that which you

cannot see. When you are using your abstract quality, you are using your intuition, your imagination, and you are looking beyond "what is" to the more subtle implications. "It is not always what it seems."

Gregorc thinks that an individual's ordering ability normally manifests itself as sequential or random.

Sequential: Allows your mind to organize information in a **linear**, step-by-step manner. When using your sequential ability, you are following a logical train of thought, a traditional approach to dealing with information. You may also prefer to have a plan and to follow it rather than rely on impulse.

Random: Lets your mind organize information by **chunks** and in no particular order. When you are using your random ability, you may often be able to skip steps in a procedure and still produce the desired result. You may even start in the middle or at the end and work backwards. You may also prefer your life to be more impulsive or spur of the moment than planned. (Gregorc, n.d.)

Dr. Gregorc (1982) believes that even though both ordering abilities are present in individuals, people are generally more comfortable using one than the other. His classifications are determined by the strongest perceptive abilities paired with the compelling ordering abilities, and they are as follows:

1. Concrete sequential (CS)

2. Abstract random (AR)

3. Abstract sequential (AS)

4. Concrete random (CR)

No one style is better or more advantageous than the others; each of the four is simply a different way of dealing with life. While no one is totally one style, most people default to one of these categories because of their basic inclinations. Following are descriptions of people in each of the groups. See if you can find yourself, as well as identify some behaviors in others that are typical for their learning styles.

CONCRETE SEQUENTIAL

The concrete sequential is a lover of neatness, order, and detail. They want specific directions and do not like to be distracted when

learning. Their preference is to do one activity at a time. They like direct instruction with hands-on practice. Their approach to change is slow and incremental. They like to be in control of most situations, and they do not like surprises. They avoid unpredictable people and circumstances. They like to work in quiet, controlled environments.

The concrete sequential is factual, organized, dependable, and punctual. Most CSs believe that you are, in fact, a little late if you show up right on time. They are hardworking, consistent, and accurate. They are great at following directions and meeting deadlines. They are usually conservative and always consistent.

Does this sound like you or someone you know? Depending on your own style, you may or may not be able to relate to this person because they have a hard time working in groups. It's difficult for them to delegate tasks because others "won't do it right." Dealing with abstract ideas or requests to "use your imagination" is also not easy for them. They are uncomfortable in unorganized environments, and they prefer to make changes in a limited, methodical, supported manner.

If this is not your style, you may see them as a bit fussy with a tendency toward being a control freak. You may resent them for wanting to do things in a particular order and insisting that the rest of you follow all the rules. You may feel like they don't ever want to change so you give up on them. However, what if you reframed your thinking by changing your beliefs about this person? Instead of labeling them a nitpicking perfectionist out to ruin every new idea, what if you acknowledge they really need to have a logically sequenced, well-structured challenge to feel comfortable?

Perhaps it would be helpful to take the extra effort to make sure when you present your ideas to this colleague that you focus on step-by-step instructions and real-life examples. Taking the time to see the valuable organizational skills this person has to offer will help you not only view them in a more favorable light but will also help them feel more valued and probably more cooperative. Often this person is a great choice for a team leader.

ABSTRACT RANDOM

Is there someone with whom you work that wakes up in a new world every day? Does this person constantly lose their train of thought, switch subjects with no warning, and bounce around like Tigger in *Winnie the Pooh*? It sounds as though we are describing someone with ADHD, but in reality, there is a learning style called *abstract random*, which manifests characteristics very similar to some of those identified with the ADHD Syndrome.

Abstract randoms are spontaneous, flexible, and quick to "jump on the bandwagon" if they believe in the idea. This individual is sensitive, compassionate, perceptive, and sentimental. They pay attention to human detail. This is the colleague who notices if you've lost weight, if you've done something different with your hair, or if you are worried about something outside of school. They are usually people pleasers who love to bring together all sorts of folks for discussions, activities, or just hanging out. They are lively, colorful, and full of energy and are comfortable in busy environments.

On the other hand, the abstract random has a great deal of trouble dealing with people who are bossy, negative, or unfriendly. They prefer to multitask rather than work on one thing at a time. They have difficulty following rules and restrictions, and they have trouble accepting even positive criticism.

ARs are generally poor time managers, and they sometimes fail to finish projects they start. People not of this ilk sometimes see them as flaky, outlandish, or just plain weird. They doubt the AR's substance and don't trust them with anything important. ARs prefer to jump right in and deal with the consequences later. In meetings, they enjoy talking off topic and dealing with feelings rather than facts.

If you are not an AR, you may be reticent to deal with one. However, if you look at this person under a different lens, maybe you can see that they do have substance but they sometimes don't show it because they're always off on the next tangent when you are still finalizing the steps in the previous one (which, by the way, is one they started and lost interest in). With the understanding that ARs are extremely sensitive and in tune with others, maybe you could simply say to them, "Sue, can you slow down a bit? I love that you always have new ideas, but we really need you to help finish this project first. You are quite the cheerleader, and we really could use your enthusiasm to complete this part before we go on."

Rather than dismiss the AR as someone you can't count on, it's probably more productive to focus on their ability to listen to others and to energize others' efforts. You eventually might be able to help them recognize how strongly their emotions affect their concentration.

ABSTRACT SEQUENTIAL

You would think that with four thinking styles, you could expect to find about 25 percent of educators in each category. You would be wrong. It has been our experience that generally less than 10 percent of faculties and staff are abstract sequentials. ASs are found in abundance at the university level, but not so much in K–12 settings. The reason there are few of them in traditional schools is

evident when you examine who they are. ASs thrive on research and do not like being hurried to make a decision. They like to have the time to thoroughly explore a topic before moving on. They prefer to direct their own learning and to work alone. They are highly skeptical and dislike distractions.

The abstract sequential at your school may be a person who demands references for everything you state. They want to know the credentials of the person or persons behind the idea you are proposing, and they have little patience with small talk or sentimental rhetoric. It's not that they are unwilling to change, but you are never going to win them over with a moving story, well-timed music, or a group hug. They need to see facts and figures. They are voracious readers, but they often fail to pick up on social cues. (Think of Sheldon Cooper on the *Big Bang Theory*).

ASs have great difficulty working with people who have differing opinions from theirs. If left unchecked, they can monopolize the conversation with little awareness of the feelings of others. Their motto is "knowledge is power." Behind their backs, you may call them "Ms. or Mr. Know-It-All" or something less kind. You may feel that they don't value you or your feelings so you avoid them when you can.

The problem with dismissing the abstract sequential is that you are missing an opportunity to relate to someone who is excellent at applying logic or finding solutions to problems. Due to their extensive reading, they probably have a wealth of knowledge they could share with you and your colleagues. Their analysis of the finer points of issues and proposals can provide invaluable information when trying to reach a decision. This is the person who not only enjoys doing the research but also is able to tease out the key points and significant details.

So rather than feeling defensive and oppressed by this person, why not consider that hurting your feelings is not their intent? Like all of us, they have their own peculiarities that are born from their need to deal with the world in a way that makes them comfortable. When they correct you or question you about your thinking, just understand that they probably don't mean it as an attack. They really want to know how you came to your conclusion. Be aware that they are more persuaded by facts than by emotion and they have little regard for hearsay.

CONCRETE RANDOM

The concrete random often has the philosophy, "If it ain't broke, break it!" Like concrete sequentials, they are based in reality, but because of their random nature, they generally like change just because they are ready for something different. Sometimes they

are the instigators of change. This person is inquisitive and independent. They do not read directions, but instead, they solve everything with a trial-and-error approach. They get the gist of ideas quickly and demonstrate the uncanny ability to make intuitive leaps when exploring unstructured problem-solving experiences. They are usually self-motivated and not interested in details.

The CRs on your staff are often a technology specialists, science teachers, or people involved in an innovative disciplines. They have an experimental attitude about everything, and they sometimes go off on their own leaving their colleagues behind. CRs have a strong need to do things in their own way. They do not like formal reports, keeping detailed records, routines, or redoing anything once it is done. Sometimes CRs are seen as mavericks who are too independent and poor team players, but that isn't necessarily true.

CRs have a tremendous capacity for accepting many different kinds of people as well as offering unique ways of doing things. They contribute unusual and creative ideas, and they are able to visualize the future. Rather than trying to rein them in, you can support their investigational approach to life and get them to help you explore your own preconceived barriers.

Because they are usually risk takers, CRs can benefit from working with sequentials—who are usually more able to anticipate possible pitfalls and trouble spots as well as adhere to deadlines. Sometimes others are put off by a perceived impatience in a CR, but upon closer examination, you may find that they are just colleagues who want to be doing rather than talking. These adventurous individuals can spark creativity in others with their intuitive, innovative thinking. As with the other three learning styles, CRs have their challenges as well as their positive qualities.

One major step toward accepting others is realizing that every style has its tradeoffs. Strength in one area is often counterbalanced by a weakness in another. Taking the time and patience to understand the true nature of a colleague's idiosyncrasies can lead to a huge payoff in building a connection with that person. Changing your beliefs about why they make some of the choices they do can change the manner in which you view and react to them. Reclaiming your joy for teaching starts with rebuilding your relationships with those who share the work you do.

THE GREGORC STYLE DELINEATOR

We recommend that the adults at school take the Gregorc Style Delineator (or some other instrument that explores basic life approaches) together and discuss the implications of their results. Generally, individuals are delighted to be able to put a finger on why some people act the way they do. We find it rewarding when

interacting adults start to realize that many things that get on their last nerve (with both adults and students) are just coping mechanisms of the offending party intrinsic to their mind style. It is much easier to tolerate the habitual lateness of a colleague when we realize they are one of the randoms and probably have no idea what time it is rather than attributing it to some kind of passive-aggressive act directed toward us. Just changing the labels from "He's so anal retentive," to "Well, that's his concrete sequential nature," is a positive step toward building community. The Gregorc Style Delineator is available for purchase online.

Gregorc's Mind Styles Model can certainly provide insight into human behavior. His theory is not the only one out there, nor is it universally accepted. However, learning and thinking about different ways that people process information undoubtedly helps us be more empathetic communicators. We can't control how other people internalize things we say and do, but we can control our intentions and how we respond when we unintentionally hurt or alienate others. Whatever thinking style, learning preference, multiple intelligence, or personality theory you subscribe to, we think it's important to gather information and think deeply about the way humans act and interact. After all, dealing with humans (both big and little) is our primary job.

We address other aspects of gathering information about human behavior in Chapter 6, but for now, consider what kinds of evidence to you need to collect to remain positive in your attitude and in your relationships with others.

●●● DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND ACTION STEPS

1. Where do you get the majority of your information about school? What about information on the world in general? Do you think your source(s) influences the way you feel about things? Do you think other people's source(s) of information influences their attitudes about things? If so, in what ways?

2. Consider the story floating around the internet about the litter box in the students' restrooms or name some other egregious report that has been recounted in your district. Discuss how and why such narratives gain so much traction. What can you as an individual or as a team do when confronted with false or misleading information?

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3. Pick a current hot issue at school. Use the steps in Appendix 1.3 *Realistic Awareness* to further explore the topic. Did using the steps expand your ideas about the subject? Why or why not?

4. Where do you direct students and parents to go when seeking accurate information about your classroom, school, or district? Why?

5. Is there a negative "hive" affecting your school community? Identify it (them) and list positive actions you have done or could do to help counteract their influence.

6. Think of an instance where you misjudged a person's intent or motive. Why do you think you made an incorrect assumption? How can you avoid making inaccurate conjectures about why others make the choices they do?

7. After taking the Mind Styles Test [see QR Code 1.2] and reading the descriptions of the four mind styles in this chapter, do you agree with how you scored? Why or why not?

8. How can considering information about areas such as mind styles improve our interactions with others?

9. How would our human relations be improved if each of us began every interaction with the assumption that others were operating with good intentions?

10. In a meeting of more than 10 people, play the children's game, Gossip (search online for Gossip Game Ideas [Benac, 2017]). Discuss how rumors and gossip interfere with the idea behind Principle #1: Gather Information.

Action Steps for School Leaders

1. Plan a staff meeting to introduce or reinforce the Four Principles of Deliberate Optimism. Lead a group in using the four principles to deal with a present school-wide issue.

2. Acquaint parents and the community with the Four Principles of Deliberate Optimism by adding the principles to school newsletters and other school publications as well as discussing them in PTO, PTA, or similar meetings.

3. Have the Four Principles of Deliberate Optimism printed for every staff member. You can use laminated pocket cards, squeeze balls, posters, or whatever suits the style of your school community.

4. Establish a place (newsletter, website, social media site, etc.) for parents, teachers, community members, and students to go to for straight facts and information. Keep it up to date; make it as transparent as possible.

5. In the most diplomatic manner possible, shine a spotlight on agitators, gossip mongers, and misinformation specialists. Provide accurate, updated information and politely ask them to avoid inflammatory rhetoric and get their facts straight before posting information.

6. When there is a problem (e.g., teachers arriving late for duty assignments), speak directly to those responsible. Blanket emails or general announcements at faculty meetings are usually ignored by the transgressors and are demoralizing to those who are doing what they are supposed to do.

7. Post a "Chain of Command" type flowchart for both parents and teachers to see. Let them know the most effective course to take for getting their needs met (e.g., calling the superintendent at home to complain about Vincent's drop from an A- to a B- in art class is not the best place to start).

8. Periodically administer inventories, questionnaires, and fun quizzes to teachers and staff to gather more information about them as individuals. With their permission, post their birthdays, special events, interests, talents, accreditations, learning goals, and so forth, so that you and others can gather insights about who they are.

9. If you don't already have one, establish a hospitality committee that will oversee team-building events and fun activities appropriate for the staff members at your school.

10. Using an asset-based approach, look at unique gifts and preferred ways of learning among staff members. Shape professional development and other activities around their strengths with personalized learning experiences. For additional suggestions, see Appendix 1.4 *Recognizing and Celebrating Staff*.

11. Set up a suggestion box so that questions and ideas can be posted anonymously. Address as many as you can and try to acknowledge the ones you cannot do (e.g., At a faculty meeting, you might state, "I'd like to acknowledge the request I got from one of you to limit the number of students in each of your sections to twenty-four. Unfortunately, with our present number of students and teachers, that is not possible, but I'm willing to look at a more equitable way to balance classes if you'll write me or come by my office and give me more details about your particular situation." Or, "I'd like to acknowledge the request for me to take a long walk off a short pier, but I really need you to be a bit more specific about what is bothering you.").