

The Principals of Success:

Employee Retention Stories
from B.C. First Nation Schools



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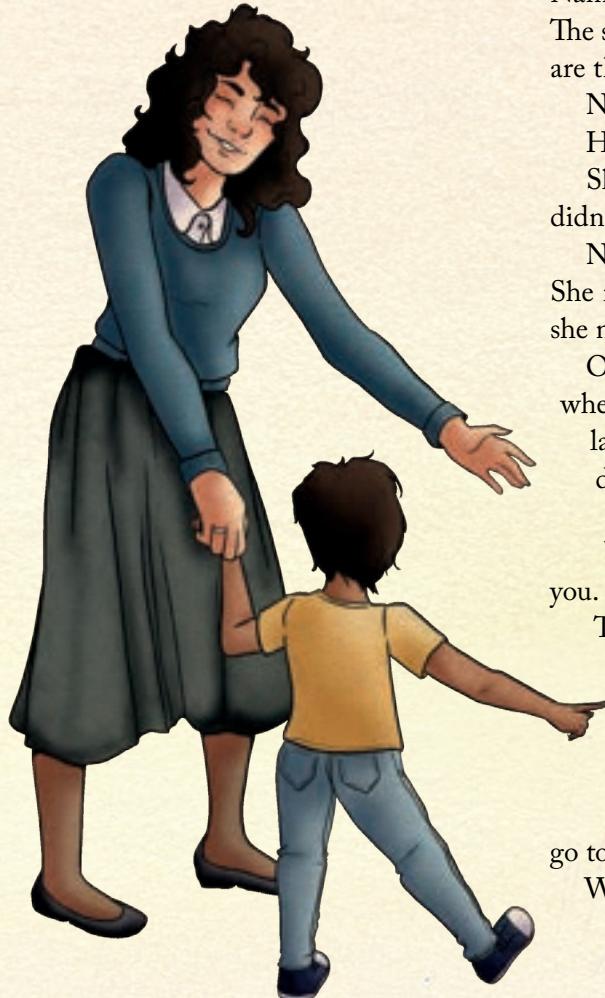
The Principals of Success: Employee Retention Stories from B.C. First Nation Schools
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Staff retention is an ongoing challenge for First Nation Schools. The purpose of this storybook is to share employee retention ideas that have worked in First Nation schools, that could easily be adopted at, and/or adapted for your school.

These stories are mostly fictional. Names, characters, communities, events and incidents are the products of the author's imagination. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events is purely coincidental.

This is an ongoing resource where each year FNESC hopes to add more stories. If you have a retention success story, please send it to hr@fnesc.ca so it can be included with future stories. Privacy will be respected and the names will be changed for all stories.

An Individual Reception



At the edge of snow-capped mountains in central British Columbia is Snowy Meadows School, a small, four room school in a First Nations community called Shawegak. The nearest neighboring town is more than 150 kilometres away by a gravel road.

Namid is one of the best teachers at the school. Over the past five years, Namid has stood out for her dedication, passion, creativity, and caring nature. The school principal, Coletta, is delighted with Namid's performance, and so are the students, their parents, and the rest of the community.

No one wants anything to change.

However, the new school year wasn't starting as planned for Namid.

She showed up for work each day looking deflated and the principal Coletta didn't know why.

Namid no longer played at recess with the children with the same energy. She no longer had the permanent smile that always characterized her. And, she no longer participated in group meetings in the same way.

One good day in late September, Coletta couldn't stand it anymore, and when she saw Namid in the staff room, she said, "Namid, I worry about you lately. I would like to be able to help you because I notice you behaving differently. Do you want to come to my office to talk at the end of the day?"

Namid responded quietly and unconvincingly, "Okay."

When Coletta saw the bewildered look of Namid, she said, "I care about you. I will see you later."

The clock moved painfully slowly for Namid that day; the seconds were minutes and the minutes were hours. She didn't know if telling Coletta what was going on was wise.

But when the time to meet came Namid felt comfortable, and she told Coletta, "What can I say Coletta? My husband and I are having a difficult time. He can't find a job in the community, and his desire to go to the city is getting stronger and stronger. It's taking a toll on both of us. We argue about things that we never argued about before. We can't go on

like this and we may need to move soon. I really didn't want to tell you because I am afraid of having to leave the community and school. I had really hoped to stay and raise a family here."

While Namid was speaking, Coletta listened carefully. Then an idea flickered across her face. She smiled at Namid and said "I think I understand and I may have an idea that could help both. Let's talk again tomorrow."

Namid had no idea how Coletta could help her, but perhaps it was one of the last opportunities that she and her husband had to continue living in Shawegak. The same community where Namid never wanted to leave. The same community where Namid wanted to raise a family. Namid went to bed hopeful because she knew Coletta had an idea.

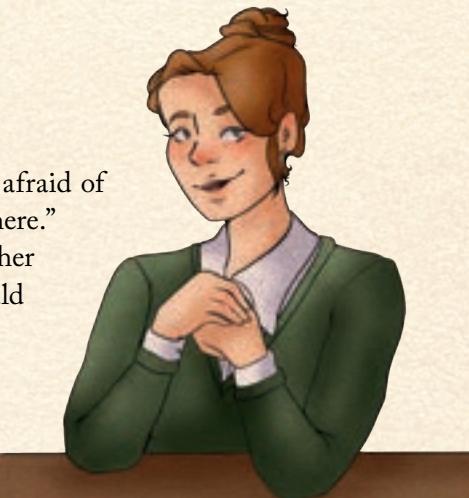
The next day they met again.

Coletta told Namid her idea which was to offer her husband the job as receptionist at Snowy Meadows School. The current receptionist, had recently given his notice. Coletta said, "If your husband is interested in the receptionist position, maybe he won't want to move to the city."

Namid was very excited because she thought her husband may be interested in the job. She was right. When she got home and told her husband, he did not hesitate for a second. He said, "That would be fantastic."

Namid's beaming smile returned to Snowy Meadows School.

Coletta was smiling too.



Thought Box

The lesson is that thinking about an individual's needs is just as important as thinking about the team's need. With a bit of careful listening and creative problem-solving Coletta not only kept Namid as a teacher, but she also filled the reception position.



Tip Box

In this story Coletta saw Namid behaving different. She noticed a change. If you have a good employee who suddenly goes from happy to sad, or from good performance to bad, don't be afraid to ask why. But understand your limitations. You may not be able to help directly, but you could still help by:

- Recommending professionals or experts (counsellors, IT specialists, personal trainers, etc.);
- Clarifying expectations and/or;
- Giving them time off.

2

A Job and a Dream

When he finished his education degree in his home province of Alberta, Max knew that he had to teach in a school that was close to the ocean so he could live out his dream. He wanted to kayak, scuba dive and be close to sea life, specially the orcas.

So when Max saw the advertisement for a teaching opportunity at Shoreside School, he immediately applied for the job.

Shoreside School is a 56-student school in the First Nations community of Baxalk, on BC's north coast. Learning on the land and water is central to the school's curriculum.

Anna, was the Director of Education for the community, with more than ten years of experience. She knew that finding staff who really wanted to live in the community and had a passion for ocean-side living was important. Retention was also very important because he wanted the students of Shoreside School to have consistency.

As Anna was sifting through resumes one day, she came across Max's application. His cover letter caught her eye.

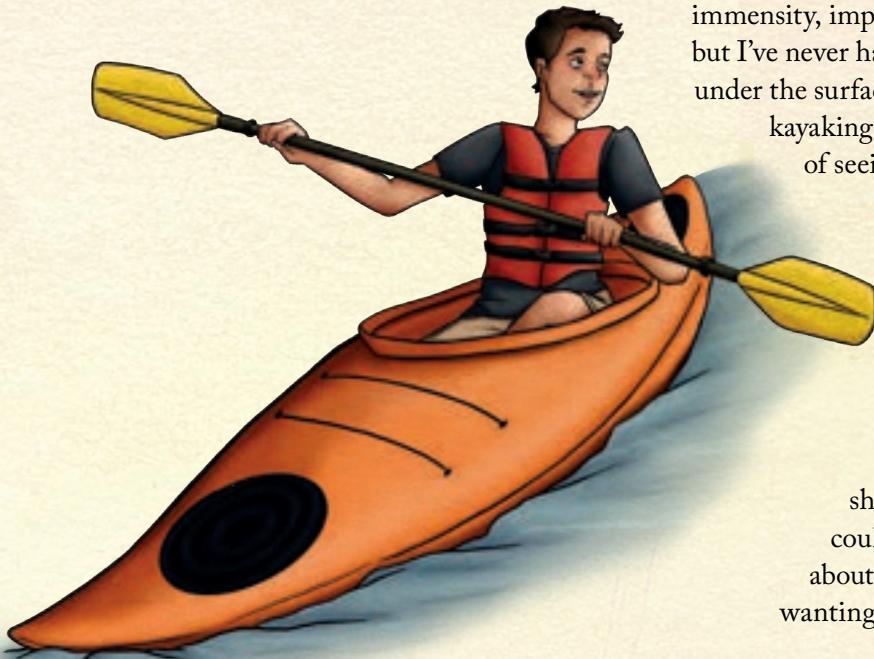
Max wrote, "My passion is the ocean. I love to contemplate its immensity, importance, and gifts. I've been to the ocean many times, but I've never had the opportunity to explore the rugged coastline, or under the surface. Two of my dreams are to get closer to the ocean by kayaking around the coastline and by scuba diving. And, I dream of seeing orcas. Someday, I will purchase a kayak and scuba equipment and fulfill my dream. Working at your school will bring me one step closer to my dream."

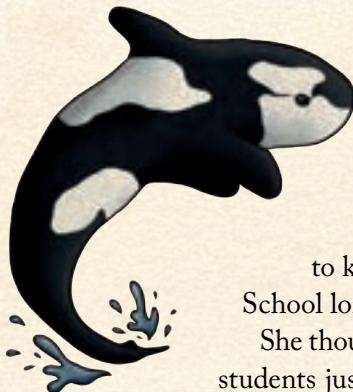
Anna immediately set up an interview with Max.

She asked him more about himself and his passion for the ocean. She learned that he had minored in Indigenous Studies.

She offered Max the job and he immediately accepted.

As Anna prepared the teacherage for Max's arrival, she kept wracking her brain for any ideas on how she could encourage Max to stay longer. She kept thinking about his passionate cover letter, and the way he spoke about wanting to get closer to the rugged shoreline of the Pacific.





As she was thinking about it, she looked outside the window of the office. She saw a raven sitting on a floating log, looking very content, and it reminded her of Max's passion and desire to own a kayak. Then the idea came!

She knew that many of the teachers that she had hired before talked about the desire to kayak, but very few had done it. And, many of those teachers had not stayed at Shoreside School long. She also remembered Max saying, "Someday, I will purchase a kayak..."

She thought, why had the other people who talked about kayaking never done it? And she realized, students just out of University don't have a lot of money, so maybe providing a kayak would help?

Anna weighed the cost and benefit, and decided if she got a teacher to stay in Baxalk for 3 to 5 years, the cost of purchasing a kayak was well worth it. She purchased two kayaks that she stored at the teacherage.

When Max arrived a few weeks later, she took him on a tour of the teacher house, and was sure to point out the two kayaks that were available for the teachers. Max's face lit up when he saw the kayaks. And the next day after school, she saw Max kayaking near the wharf with one of the other teachers, named Clifton. Clifton was a good teacher, but never seemed to be completely happy. Both Max and Clifton looked happy and excited as they paddled away from the dock.

Fast forward two years, Max was still at Shoreside School. So was Clifton. The two of them fit into the community perfectly and enjoyed many day kayak trips, and some overnight kayak trips together. They had become great friends and colleagues, and shared a passion for kayaking and the ocean. Anna also knew, from Max telling her, that Max had fulfilled his dream of seeing Orcas.

Anna reflected on her decision to purchase the kayaks. What a wise investment! She appreciated the little nudge from the raven on the log.



Thought Box

There are two lessons:

1. **Connect personal passions to work.** Max's personal passion is the ocean, and Anna connected Max's personal passion by purchasing the kayaks.
2. **Connect people at work.** The kayak was the key to Clifton building a friendship with Max.

By connecting Max's passion to work, and Clifton with Max; Anna planted the seed to strong engagement for Max and Clifton.



Tip Box

In this story Anna bought two kayaks because Shoreside School is close to the ocean. Adapt the idea to your community. For example, buy snowmobiles or some snowshoes if you are the Rockies, buy Nordic walking poles or a tent for hiking or camping if you are in the interior, or buy a horse if you are in the Cariboo.



3

A Positive Opportunity

One sunny October morning Bill opened the door of the school and loved what he saw. The sights and sounds of children playing and laughing brought a smile to his face. He knew that his work had made a difference in the past 5 years as the Principal at Tumbleweed School.

Even though he was proud and happy, he knew that there was still a lot more to learn. A passion for learning is one of the things that made him a great leader.

After the usual welcoming ceremony Bill opened his computer to read his email as he always did. But that day one of his emails caught his attention, and it worried him.

Alison, the Chief of the First Nation, had written, "Bill, when you have some time this afternoon, come by my office, I'd like to have a chat with you."

Bill was anxious. Was there a problem?

Bill was so concerned about the email that he wanted to find out what it was about as soon as possible. So just before lunch Bill went to Alison's office.

Alison got right to the point. "Bill, I just want to tell you that I'm very happy with the job that you are doing at the school. When I go to the school the kids seem happy, and I see improvement in reading, writing, and math. I believe that this improvement is due to your hard

work. I just want to thank you, and I would love if the improvement continues.”

Bill’s smile beamed the rest of the day. In fact, the good feeling lasted all week.

Then he started thinking. “If what Alison told me made me feel that good, then maybe the staff will feel the same if I tell them what I like about the work that they are doing.”

In fact, Bill realized that giving positive feedback was something he seldom did. He usually focussed on solving problems, but not on reinforcing those things that employees were doing well.

Bill also thought, “I was very anxious because Alison called me to her office. I wonder if staff are anxious when I call them to my office. Do they assume that being called to my office is for something bad, just as I assumed when Alison called me?”



Thought Box

There are two lessons:

1. **Look for opportunities to give positive feedback.** Bill realized he had to reinforce what employees did well. Bill learned this by feeling good after he received feedback from Alison.
2. **Be aware of how people may perceive you.** Bill realized that asking employees to come to his office may create anxiety. If you can set a tone that reduces anxiety you start off in a better position.



Tip Box

In this story Bill received positive feedback in Alison’s office. However, positive feedback doesn’t need to be in a formal place. Give positive feedback whenever the opportunity arises. It can be in the corridor, parking lot, lunch room, etc.

4

A Mountain of Gratitude



Rick knew that everyone at Lake Omma Elementary School had been through a tough year. It was a year when they had to adapt to changes due to the COVID-19 pandemic. That included following public health guidance and implementing new policies like the vaccination policy, travel restrictions, and adapting to virtual learning.

One sunny May morning Rick was walking around the school playground and reflecting on the past year. He was thinking how smoothly the year went despite the many obstacles. His employees had adapted quickly and effectively and Rick felt compelled to show them his appreciation.

Summer was just around the corner, but unfortunately it was most likely not going to be a normal summer. Travel restrictions were still in place, employees who were not from Lower Talmatxw (the community in which Lake Omma Elementary School was located) were going to have a hard time visiting family, and employees who wanted to go on vacation were going to have a difficult time travelling.

As Rick was walking around the patio he noticed a house with a "For Rent" sign. His face lit up because he had a magnificent idea.

That same morning, Rick walked into the office of Melody, the community's Education Director.

"Hi Melody, I have a suggestion that I want you to consider. As you know this wasn't an easy year and all the employees in the school did a fantastic job. I would like to reward them with something and I have an idea."

"Tell me Rick, what is your idea?", Melody said.

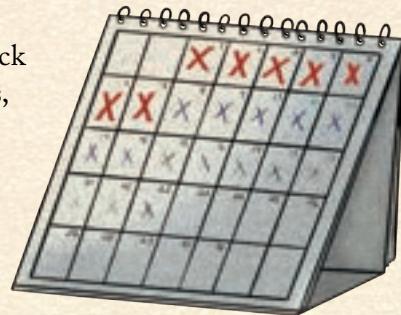
"If I remember correctly the community has some cabins in the mountains with views of the lake, right? I was thinking that maybe one of them could be used as holiday accommodation so that each employee could reserve a few days in the summer to be there with their family or friends. I am sure that everyone would love to be able to spend a few days in such a beautiful place."

"I like that idea. Let me talk to the Chief and ask if we can do that."

"Thanks a lot Melody."

The good news came soon. The chief was fine with the plan. The same day Rick received the go ahead, he put a calendar in the staff room and told his three teachers, three education assistants, and his custodian that each of them could reserve a week in July or August to go there with their family or friends.

Rick's plan turned out perfectly. In just four days the calendar was filled and the seven employees had a week of vacation. Rick also booked a week for himself and his wife.



Thought Box

The lesson is that sometimes effective appreciation can be giving something that people don't realize they need or want. In this case Rick gave a week of vacation in a year where taking a vacation away from home was difficult or impossible.



Tip Box

In this story Lower Talmatw provided with a week of vacation because the cabins were available at the time. Determine whether or not there are activities or resources in your community that may be good appreciation opportunities.

An Individual Preference

“I am so happy darling! Let me read to you what my boss wrote on Facebook today.” Maria told her husband enthusiastically as she entered the house. Maria read the Facebook post aloud:

Thank you very much to the two super-stars Maria and Pete! Both offered to volunteer for the afternoon activities. Maria will take basketball and Pete will take the Chess Club.

I’m really thankful to have such a good team players. The effort and positivity that you both give to Chief Michael School hasn’t gone unnoticed. Keep it up!

I’m looking forward to seeing more of this type of work from all of you in the future.

Oliver

“I’m very glad Maria! If I remember correctly, you also received a similar complement when you volunteered to open the gym at 8 in the morning when school starts at 9, right?” her husband said.

“That’s right, Oliver also thanked me first in person and then on Facebook. I loved it.”





(Knock, Knock) "Good evening Oliver. May I come in?"

"Come in Pete, come in. How can I help you?"

"Hi, I just wanted to ask you a favour. Please don't do what you did on Facebook again. I felt very uncomfortable and I don't understand why everyone has to know that I took the Chess Club."

"I am sorry. I didn't want to make you uncomfortable."

"I thought you know me better."

This story at Chief Michael School resulted in two very different outcomes. Oliver, the principal of the school, wanted to recognize Maria and Pete's effort, and encourage the rest of the staff to volunteer for future events. This goal makes sense, however, while Maria loved it, Pete hated it.



Thought Box

The lesson is that sometimes effective recognition works if you consider individuals rather than groups. Some individuals enjoy public recognition and attention, while others prefer a more low-key acknowledgment. Maria enjoyed public recognition, but Pete would have preferred something more private.



Tip Box

In this story Oliver didn't think about how Maria and Pete would react. If you have doubts whether or not your employee enjoys public recognition meet somewhere in the middle and watch their reaction. For example, if you are in a meeting and you say "thank you David for helping to organize the library", pay attention at his body language. If he responds with a smile and pride, he is probably liking it. If he shows embarrassment, he is probably not enjoying the moment.

A Barrier Broken



William knew that he could become a teacher if he wanted to, since he had demonstrated an excellent attitude and aptitude during his two years at the school as an Education Assistant.

The principal of the Upper Magaluz School, Betty, had already suggested becoming a teacher to him, twice, without much response from William.

Betty wondered how to convince him. She was resolved to try again.

Betty knew that this week presented a good opportunity. The teacher whose Grade 7 class William supported was going to be absent all week due to a family emergency. The teacher had left her lesson plans prepared for William to take on the class.

Betty was sure that William would do very well. And he did. When she passed by the classroom, it seemed like William had been teaching for years. The children were happy and there were no issues.

On Thursday Betty sat down to eat lunch with William:

“It seems that you are doing well William. How’s the week going?”

“I was a bit nervous but the truth is that the children are making it easy for me. I am very happy.”

“I can see your happiness. Are you having any thoughts about being a teacher?”

“I’d be lying if I told you I don’t think about it.”

“Well William, then you know what I’m going to suggest right?”

William laughed, he knew perfectly well what Betty was referring to:

“I’ve been thinking about it Betty, but it worries me.”

“What are you worried about?”

“I’ve been looking at the Teacher Education Program. The first part is fine, it only requires evenings and weekends. But the final part of the program requires me to attend the university in person from 12 to 18 months. So I will not be able to work during that time. My worry is if when I complete the program I won’t have a job here. I am very happy here and I don’t want to work anywhere else.”

“Of course, you would have a job here! I would make sure of that.”

“I see. It is a very long-term plan but I am more and more convinced, thank you very much.”

“I’m so happy you are considering this because I think you will be a good teacher. I will support you however I can.”



The conversation continued with anecdotes about the students and various other topics.

Betty was happy because she had planted the seed and shown William that he had her support. William was happy because he felt that although it was not going to be easy, he had the support of Betty.



Thought Box

There are two lessons:

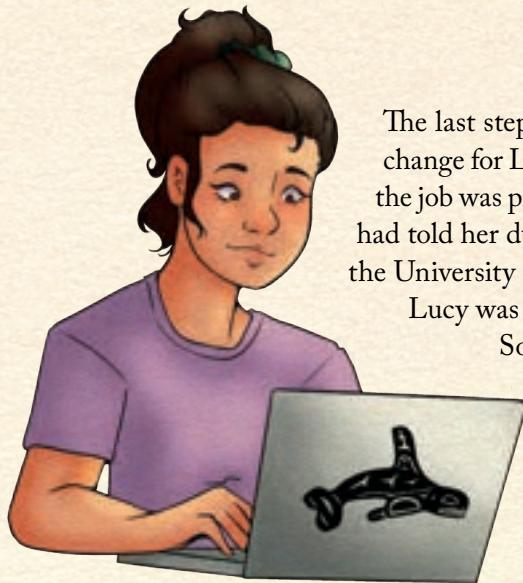
1. Timing matters. Betty chose a very good time to bring up the subject of William becoming a teacher.
2. Removing the barriers is a key to persuade people to be less resistant. Betty removed the barrier of William’s fear of losing his job.



Tip Box

In this story Betty waited for the right time. The “teachable moment” can happen when something goes very well, but it can also happen when something goes very wrong. Be prepared and when something happens take advantage of the opportunity.

A Universal Reputation



The last step before Lucy landed her dream job was reference check. It was going to be a big change for Lucy, going from living in Vancouver to living in remote northern BC. And although the job was practically hers, Lucy remembered that the principal of Matis Town School, Thomas, had told her during the interview that if she got the job she would not be the only teacher from the University of British Columbia.

Lucy was curious. She wanted to find out who the teacher was.

So Lucy searched LinkedIn to see which of the school's teacher had gone to UBC. She couldn't believe it. It was Alan! Although they had lost contact, Alan was one of Lucy's best friends at university.

Lucy wrote to him on Facebook:

Mr Alan! How is life?

10:19 AM

Lucy! It has been a while! Great! I am working at a First Nation School and I love it. And you? How's everything going?

That's exactly what I wanted to talk to you about my old friend. I'm doing so well that it seems like fate is bringing us together again. I received a job offer from Matis Town School and Thomas, the Principal of your school, told me that there was someone at the school who also studied at UBC. So I went on LinkedIn and found you worked there!

I can't believe it. Seriously?

Yeah for sure!

WOW! It would be awesome if we get to work together. Thomas is a good boss!

Why is Thomas a good boss? From the way you say it, it seems like you're super happy

Well I wouldn't say I am super happy, but I can't complain. I have no issues at all with him. All the opposite. I feel supported and I feel that he really cares about me.

Tell me more please or give me some examples

Okay. I will tell you what he does often that I find helpful. I would say that once a month or something like that he asks me very specific questions about ideas or tools that can improve my job, and then he makes sure that he follows up my ideas. I remember a time when I told him I needed a projector. I had it the following day. And I remember a time when I told him I wanted a smartboard and he came two days later and he explained to me why it wasn't possible to have

That sounds good

Yes, he also cares about me personally and I think he does cares for everyone because the way everyone speaks about him. One day he asked me if there were any individuals who he could recognize. I told him that my EA was doing a very good job and I know that after I told him he gave kudos to my EA.

Nice. Is he also a teacher? Or he just runs the school? I forgot to ask him during my interview.

In theory, he only manages, but sometimes he steps in and helps any teacher that need help with substitutions, or any support we may need in class. A great example is what happened last week. We had the kids perform a play in the gymnasium and I needed to clean the gymnasium for another use after the kid's performance. Guess who stayed in the gymnasium helping cleaning everything? Bingo, it was Thomas! If I could define him with a phrase, it would be that he "leads by the example".

I am excited to work there!

You should. Sorry, I have to go, but if you need anything please call me. It would be awesome if you end up signing that offer!

Thanks a lot Alan, I'll see you soon 😊

A few days later, Lucy signed the offer letter.

Everything Alan told about the principal's management style was an important factor in her decision to take the position. In particular, she liked that Thomas managed by walking around and talking to people, which is an effective way to find out information that impacts your employees in order to make improvements.

Alan's glowing recommendation of the principal and school went a long way!



Thought Box

The lesson is that you never know when your reputation will follow you. Thomas's positive reputation was important in Lucy's decision to take the job.



Tip Box

In this story Thomas's was an effective manager because he walked around the school to find out how things are going. Here are few questions that you can use when you walk around your school to find out how things are going:

- What is working well?
- Are there any staff members whom I can recognize?
- What systems can be improved?
- Do you have the tools and equipment to complete your job?

Remember, it is very important to be prepared to respond. Responding means taking action, saying "no" when necessary, and giving the reason why you are saying no. You also need to ensure that your employees realize when action has been taken.

A Life-Long Learner



"If I went to a desert island I would take books with me," Rose told her friends on Saturday night as they ate and laughed around the fire.

Rose had lost count how many books she had read in her lifetime. Through books she could fly to Never Land or walk through Sherwood Forest, gaze upon the great African savannah or find out about Oprah Winfrey. Books opens her eyes.

Reading was Rose's greatest passion and she wanted to share it with her students.

Rose worked in a community of about 600 people, so it was easy to connect with everyone in the community. That was the case for Rose, a teacher, and Jana, the principal. Jana was a neighbor of one of Rose's friends. Jana had a very good relationship with her neighbour and it didn't take her long to find out how much fun her neighbour had with Rose on Saturday night.

Jana's neighbour told her "I was surprised that Rose would choose books if she went to a desert island. You are lucky to have Rose as a teacher."

At work that week Jana was working on Professional Development. She realized that Rose still hadn't used any of the money they had set aside. She began to think about different opportunities that could be beneficial for Rose, and therefore for the school. Jana remembered that three years ago a former teacher had attended a conference called "Supporting Reluctant Readers," and that teacher brought back lot of good ideas from the conference. Jana thought Rose would love the conference and will bring back lot of good ideas. Jana knew exactly how she would let Rose know. She laughed at her plan.

The next morning Jana got to school half an hour earlier than she usually does and printed out the informational brochure for the conference. She left it on Rose's desk for Rose to see it when she arrived at work. Jana knew that it could be a pleasant surprise for Rose.

Everything happened as Jana planned. Rose was surprised, and had a smile from ear to ear. Rose completed the professional development application, and Jana approved it.

Rose loved the conference. And she came from the conference with ideas to share with her class, and ideas to share with other teachers.



Thought Box

The lesson is that continuous learning benefits both the employee and the employer. Jana supported Rose with a professional development opportunity that she knew Rose would love and would benefit the school.



Tip Box

In this story learning about Rose's passion was key to Jana. Try to learn more about your employees and, when it is possible, connect their personal passion with something at work. This will increase interest or motivation. A previous tip suggested to ask questions as you walk around. Who knows what you will learn if you ask, "What did you do this weekend?"

A Reasonable Excuse

It is important for Sally, the principal of Cedar Community School, to be on time. She expects that from everyone around her. And she considers it non-negotiable. Coming to work on time, starting classes on time, finishing classes on time, and attending meetings on time is what she expects from all employees.

If employees are not on time, she reminds them about her expectation to be on time. And then eventually she disciplines them. Liam has suffered the most reprimands from Sally. On two occasions Sally noticed that Liam's Grade 5 class started late. When Liam was trying to explain the reason to Sally, she got defensive and said "There are no excuses Liam. Schedules are there to be respected and followed!"

Sally is also demanding about her family being on time. She expects that her son Rob, has to be sitting at the table at 6 pm for dinner. When Rob is late, Sally gets really angry and scolds him.

One day when Rob arrived late at the table, Sally got very angry at him.

Afterwards her husband told her: "Sally, you have to be reasonable. I know that you want Rob to be on time but what if Rob had a good excuse? You should ask Rob why he arrived late before you get upset. Did you know his girlfriend was locked out of her house and he didn't want to leave her alone in the dark?"

Sally felt bad about reprimanding Rob. She went to bed thinking, "I should find out the excuse before I get angry", she also thought "Maybe I should do the same at the school, too."



The following day Liam was late again. He was seven minutes late starting his class. At recess Sally didn't hesitate, she went to talk with Liam.

"Liam, do you have a moment? Remember I told you the schedules are there for a reason and it looks like you are starting the class seven minutes late." She thought about last night and added: "What is going on?"

There was silence. Sally broke the silence, saying "I am not mad. I just want to know why you were late."

Liam, was visibly surprised. He said, "This morning I got a phone call from the mother of one of my students, Charlie. She told me that her car broke down and asked if I could pick up Charlie today. So I went to his house to pick him up and that made late. I'm sorry."

Sally thought about the good advice that her husband gave her. "Liam is a very good teacher and perhaps I have been unfair to him. Maybe he has had good excuses for his lateness in the past."

So Sally said, "Okay Liam I am sorry. I think that is a valid reason. The next time you are going to be late like this, can you please call me?"



Thought Box

The lesson is that it is important to be reasonable which, in this case means, considering all the facts before jumping to conclusions. Sally learned that in order for her to be reasonable she had to ask Liam the reason of his lateness before deciding what her response was.

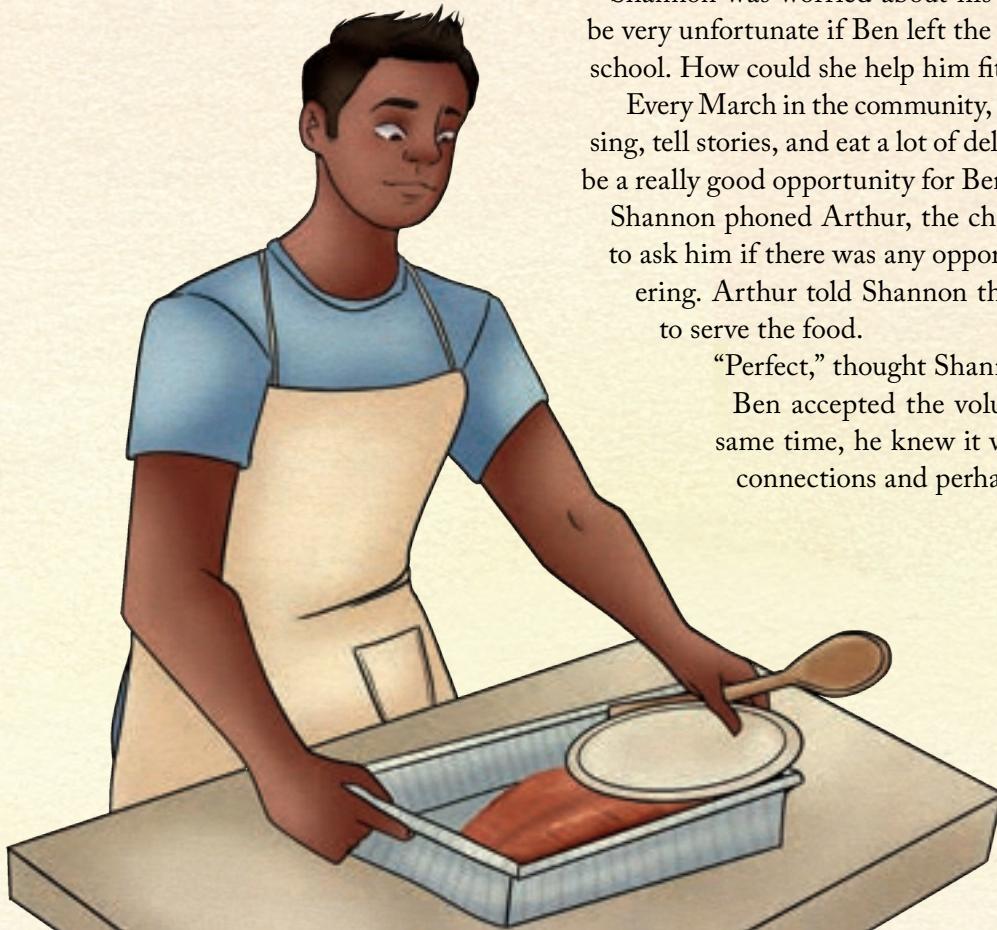


Tip Box

In this story Sally asked Liam why he was late. Prior to disciplining an employee, in order to ensure that you are being reasonable you should:

1. Find out what they have to say;
2. Check your policies or collective agreement for expectations and procedures;
3. Check their employment contract for any related clause or language.

A Friendship For The Long Run



Six months after starting as a new teacher at the school, Ben was doing well.

The school's principal, Shannon, was pleased. She thought Ben was a good teacher and had a lot to offer the school. She asked him to a meeting to check in with him about how everything was going.

During the meeting Ben mentioned that he wasn't feeling part of the community. That made him wonder if the community was a good fit for him in the long term.

Shannon was worried about his comment about not fitting in. It would be very unfortunate if Ben left the school, given that he is a good fit for the school. How could she help him fit him into the community?

Every March in the community, there was a gathering where people dance, sing, tell stories, and eat a lot of delicious food. Shannon thought this might be a really good opportunity for Ben to make connections and make friends.

Shannon phoned Arthur, the chief of the Lower Meadows Community, to ask him if there was any opportunity for Ben to take a role at the gathering. Arthur told Shannon that they were still looking for volunteers to serve the food.

"Perfect," thought Shannon.

Ben accepted the volunteer role. Nervous and excited at the same time, he knew it was a very good opportunity to establish connections and perhaps make some friends too.

On the day of the gathering, everything went according to plan. Ben enjoyed all of the events and met a wide range of people. After lunch was served Ben got a plate of food and sat next to Adrian and Daniel, who involved Ben into their conversation about trail running. The three of them made plans to go for a long run on Saturday.

At the end of the school year Ben and Shannon sat down for Ben's annual performance review.

During the meeting Ben told Shannon how happy he was. Since the gathering he had participated in more community events and made friends with similar interests.

Hearing this made Shannon happy. She knew that making friends in the community was very important if she wanted to keep Ben at the school for the long term.



Thought Box

In a previous story the lesson was the importance of building connections at work. In this story the lesson is that in First Nation communities, especially in remote communities, it is also important to help build connections in the community. Shannon created the opportunity for Ben to connect with the community by having him volunteering at the gathering.



Tip Box

In this story a community gathering helped Ben to make friends. However, gatherings are not the only opportunities for new school staff to build connections in the community. A good idea could be to provide new employees with a list of the clubs in your community.

This is an ongoing resource where each year FNESC hopes to add more stories. If you have a retention success story, please send it to hr@fnesc.ca so it can be included with future stories. Privacy will be respected and the names will be changed for all stories.

About the Illustrator:

Kelly “Kell” Palm is from the small town of Roberts Creek, British Columbia. Kell is a member of the 'N̄amgis First Nation, and a student at Emily Carr University of Art and Design. They are currently completing a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Illustration. Their practice consists primarily of character creation and design, striving for realistic representation and diversity.



The First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC)

is a policy and advocacy organization that represents and works on behalf of First Nations in BC. FNESC has a mandate to support First Nations in their efforts to improve the success of all First Nations students and advance First Nations education in BC by disseminating information, undertaking research, administering programs and services, and advocating and negotiating with the provincial and federal governments and other key stakeholders at the direction of First Nations.



The First Nations Schools Association (FNSA)

was created to promote improved educational outcomes for students attending First Nations schools by supporting the development and implementation of appropriate, meaningful and quality education programs and providing a forum for networking and information sharing amongst schools and other education partners. The FNSA is committed to designing programs to assist First Nations schools in creating effective and linguistically and culturally appropriate education environments that provide students with a positive foundation in all academic areas.

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