

Leading in the Fishbowl

Safeguarding Principal Identity and Wellbeing

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SESSION GOAL

To identify how school division norms inadvertently force principals into "Identity Traps" and to co-construct actionable strategies that structurally scaffold internal permission for school leaders to be well.

CORE CONCEPTS

1

The Continuum of Role Integration

Managerial (deliberate self/role separation) ↔ Familial (personal identity and role are fully blurred)

2

The Collapsed Backstage

Physical community visibility + 24/7 social media scrutiny have eliminated the private space leaders once used to recover.

3

The Culture of Martyrdom

In rural and tight-knit communities, the "always-on" expectation normalizes self-sacrifice, making it feel dangerous — even disloyal — for leaders to grant themselves permission to rest.

4

Identifying Identity Traps

How system leaders can support school leaders in today's landscape.

PERMISSION SLIP ACTIVITY ·

What Permission do School Leaders Need but Rarely Give Themselves?

STATION 1 The "My Kids" Expectation — The Familial Trap

THE SCENARIO

A dedicated principal, praised by the district for a relational, "familial" leadership style, is devastated by a targeted social media attack. The district office stays quiet to "avoid validating trolls," leaving the principal to absorb the hit alone.

WHAT DO YOU SEE AS THE TRAP?

WHAT SUPPORT CAN A SYSTEM-LEVEL LEADER PROVIDE?

STATION 2 The 50-Foot Videotron — The Martyrdom Trap

THE SCENARIO

A principal in a tight-knit "rurban" community is now reluctant to go to the local grocery store because community members constantly watch their cart, whisper, and corner them about school policies. They feel they can never truly be "off the clock."

WHAT DO YOU SEE AS THE TRAP?

WHAT SUPPORT CAN A SYSTEM-LEVEL LEADER PROVIDE?

STATION 3 The Silence of the System — The Digital Panopticon Trap

THE SCENARIO

Facing relentless online scrutiny from a community Facebook group, a principal completely abandons their focus on teaching and learning. To survive, they adopt a reactive, day-to-day identity of a "crisis manager" just trying to keep the building running, but they aren't causing any issues, either.

WHAT DO YOU SEE AS THE TRAP

WHAT SUPPORT CAN A SYSTEM-LEVEL LEADER PROVIDE?

MY COMMITMENTS
Returning to My School Division With Intention

Leaders cannot give what they do not have. What will you commit to doing differently when you return?

ONE THING I WILL STOP	ONE THING I WILL START	ONE THING I WILL PROTECT

A PRINCIPAL I WILL CHECK IN WITH

ONE SYSTEMIC CHANGE I HAVE THE POWER TO MAKE