

The power of 10 Minutes – developing a trusting relationship with school leaders

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The brainchild of 10 Minute Rounds formed after the completion of my Graduate Certificate in Instructional Leadership [Melbourne University]. Inspired and enthused by the work of Prof John Hattie and Prof Stephen Dinham, I began to question; how do we look after our quality teachers and how are we collecting their valued input on a regular basis?

Teachers need to feel supported by their leadership teams, heard by their colleagues and they also need a strong support network for practical and emotional reasons. In leadership circles, we often talk about ‘gathering feedback’ from staff especially when big decisions are being made around policy or protocol but how authentic is this feedback if it is only gathered at irregular intervals?

Strong interpersonal skills, quality relationships, and effective communication are widely recognised as essential leadership traits. These are reinforced in the AITSL Standards for Principals, leadership requirements (Personal Qualities, Social and Interpersonal skills) but how do school leaders make time to effectively communicate with their teachers? Hence, 10 Minute Rounds was born.

What are 10 Minute Rounds?

10 Minute Rounds provide every teacher with a 10-minute audience with their leader, every week. It is a forum for two-way communication between the classroom teachers and leadership. A standard set of questions is asked at each 10 Minute Round, beginning with success stories and ending with open-ended feedback. The leader listens and records the feedback. 10 Minute Rounds are mostly an ‘information giving’ exercise or sounding board for staff. Leaders should not be tempted to answer all the questions and queries presented to them. The 10 Minute Round ends with a set of actions, if necessary, to hold both leadership and the teachers accountable. Leadership meetings should commence with a 10 Minute Round debrief where all lead-

ers report back from the 10 Minute Rounds conducted during the week. Here, leaders can see patterns in teacher grievances across the school but also gather feedback on school initiatives allowing leadership to gauge potential roadblocks to its success.

How do 10 Minute Rounds work?

Each member of leadership is responsible for a cohort of teachers. They must negotiate a time to meet with the teachers at the same time every week. It could be before school, after school or during the teacher’s D.O.T.T. For example, each assistant principal has a designated cohort; assistant principal ‘A’ is responsible for Kindergarten to Year 2 and Assistant Principal ‘B’ is responsible for Year 3 to year 6. The Principal might be accountable for the Specialist Teachers.

You meet with teachers as a pair or cohort. So, in a double-stream school, the leader would make a time to meet with both year level teachers at once, for example, both Year 1 teachers will gather for their 10 Minute Round on Monday at 8 am.

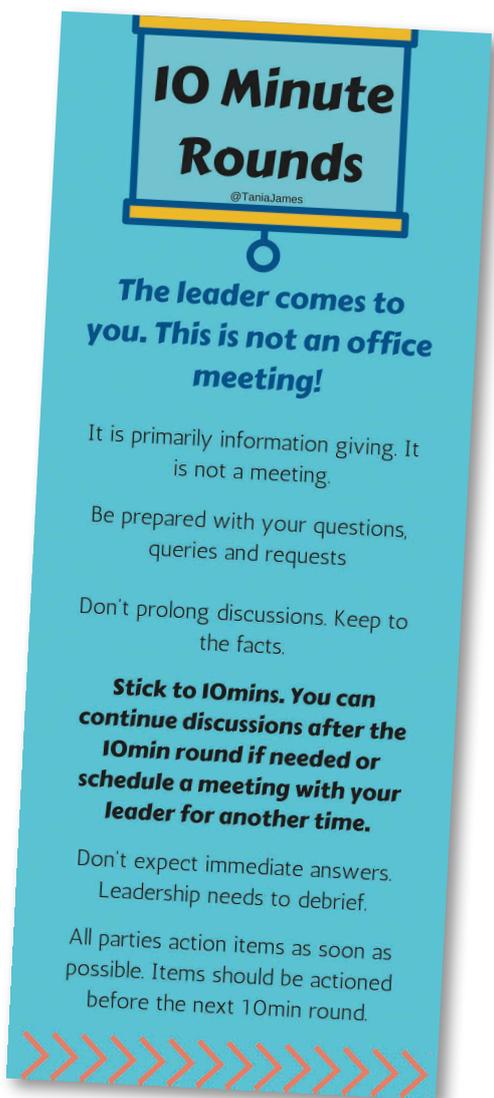
The 10 Minute Rounds must not go over 10 minutes. This avoids eating into the teacher’s time, (unless all parties agree to extend the time). If an issue arises during the 10 Minute Round which requires extensive discussion, the leader will make an alternative appointment time with that individual teacher before leaving the 10 Minute Round. For example, if there is a concern about a particular student or an issue pertaining just to that teacher.

Leaders visit the classroom. 10 Minute Rounds are not an invitation to walk up to the office. This is very important! 10 Minute Rounds are an opportunity for leaders to get down to the classrooms and meet with the teachers face-to-face. It is about entering the teacher’s world and seeing it from their perspective.

Let them speak. As hard as it is, leaders shouldn’t respond immediately with solutions to the more significant problems. The idea is that leaders become a sounding board and will then report back to the entire leadership team for consultation. Once



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the leadership team has had an opportunity to debrief, appropriate and team centred responses can be feedback to the staff members. This ensures all members of the leadership team are part of the response and the responsibility or consequence of that response rests on the whole team, not an individual leader. It also ensures fairness and equity. Teachers are safe in the knowledge that the entire leadership team will hear their concerns, grievances and success stories via the 10 Minute Round.

Pros and cons

It takes a little while for staff to get into the habit of the appropriate use of 10 Minute Rounds. For example, most staff grievances can and should be, handled via 10 Minute Rounds. If a staff member airs a grievance during a staff meeting (which can sometimes throw the meeting agenda off track) a gentle reminder in the form of “Did you bring up this issue with your leader at 10 Minute Rounds before bringing it to the meeting today?” is all that is

needed to redirect the group back on track

Leave Requests and PD Requests are handled via 10 Minute Rounds too, this means the leadership team can discuss personal leave and professional development requests as a group before declining or approving the requests (nothing rests on an individual leader’s shoulders, the Principal also has the backing of his/her leadership team when it comes to delivering the outcome of the decision).

Staff cannot play members of leadership off against each other. This simply means all staff are aware of who their leader is and how to communicate to leadership via the 10 Minute Round protocol. All requests for time off, duty swaps, DOTT timetable swaps, purchasing of resources etc. must go through the relevant leader during the 10 Minute Round. For example, if the Principal gets a direct request from a staff member, he / she will simply state “This hasn’t come up at our leadership meetings, have you brought this up with your leader at 10 Minute Rounds?” The staff member would have to retreat and make requests through the proper channels first.

Leadership can float ideas. Leadership might float a new idea or protocol, before actioning it school-wide. The leaders can pitch the idea discretely at 10 Minute Rounds and get a feel for the staff reaction. For example, leadership may want to introduce a new IEP template; leaders can show this at 10 Minute Rounds to get feedback and then make amendments before pitching it at a staff meeting.

Is it repetitive and boring? Not really. Staff look forward to this time with their leaders and it only takes 10 minutes. After a few sessions, teachers come prepared for the 10 Minute Round and often it takes less than 10 minutes. In passing through the corridors, I’ve overheard teachers say, “So, I’m going to bring that up in my 10min round this week”. This is a perfect example of staff following protocol to create change or resolve an issue. Some staff members may not be comfortable voicing these in a public forum, such as at a staff meeting or PLC. The 10 Minute Round protocol provides a forum for teachers to feedback, safe in the knowledge their voice will be heard by their school leaders

It holds leadership and teachers Accountable: For example, a teacher might

ask for help with a student, the immediate response from a leader would be “What have you tried so far?” The leader will make an alternative time to sit down and assist this teacher with strategies. The following week, the leader would check back on the actions of the last 10 Minute Round and investigate how the strategies are working with that student. Alternatively, there may be a situation that the leader needs to action, and the teacher can then hold the leader accountable the following week at 10 Minute Rounds.

If you don’t ask, you don’t know! Because half of the questions are open-ended, you can gather a lot of information that you wouldn’t usually get without having asked. Leadership gets an insight into what teachers are thinking and feeling regarding school protocol and processes. The feedback that ensues can sometimes be a huge eye-opener. We often get excellent ideas and suggestions coming through to leadership from our 10 Minute Rounds. Essentially, the 10 Minute Round opens up that weekly, face-to-face contact, building on relationships between teachers and leaders.

The beauty of 10 Minute Rounds is that leaders get an intimate dialogue with their teachers on a regular basis. Leaders also get to hear about little issues which may not always make it to the leadership table but might be playing a significant part in the teacher’s workday. This can be invaluable information for a leadership team who might be trying to build school culture. Being human, I sometimes miss my 10 Minute Rounds, only to have the staff say to me, “I’ve been saving this great success story for you but you missed my 10min round!” If a 10 Minute Round is missed, it is essential to reschedule within a few days to keep the protocol consistent. The protocol of 10 Minute Rounds creates a safe zone for teachers by providing a vehicle for developing trusting relationships with school leaders.

You can download the 10 Minute Round template here: http://taniajames.weebly.com/uploads/1/3/2/0/13200572/taniajames_10_minute_round_template2018.pdf

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