

THIRD ARTICLE:

CURRENT STATUS OF SCHOOL LEADERSHIP IN THE UNITED STATES

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Biography

Dr. David Samore has been a teacher and administrator of K-12 schools for 35 years in Iowa, Florida, South Carolina and Colombia. Dr. Samore served as Director of Global Leadership and Innovation in Palm Beach County, Florida and in 2015 was named Florida Director of the Year by the NASSP, highlighting his efforts to create opportunities for all students. As principal, Samore's immersion school (Spanish and English) was twice recognized as the School of the Year for North

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ABSTRACT

Due to current critical conditions, school principals in the U.S. are swimming in troubled waters. Although they have a great deal of power and influence, expectations are excessively high and the decline in candidates for the position is a clear sign of the challenge. This contribution, the last in a series of three articles, recounts a day of a fictional high school principal, Jessica Morales-Smith. This long look at one day in a principal's professional life exemplifies the rhythm of activities and interactions over the course of about 13 hours – a typical day – during which there is no rest at all. The American principal is always at the center of the stage, illuminated by the spotlight everywhere. Even over the weekend, whoever chooses to pursue school administration accepts that their job extends far beyond the workweek.

KEYWORDS: Silo, software, walkie-talkie, town hall meeting, mass shooting,

INTRODUCTION

The profession of the educator has always been uneven in the sense that changes, in all interpretations, are relentless. It is impossible to accurately anticipate what will happen on any given day. For many, a professional life that consists of the daily challenge of establishing homeostasis within a dynamic and changeable environment produces worrying stress. When the professional educator is asked why he is still in the profession despite the unpredictable pace, the common answer is precisely "because every day is different" and that aspect serves as an attraction (Alias, 2019).

In this series of three contributions with the theme of the current state of U.S. educational leadership, the first article focused on the general state as the basic background in which K-12 education exists in public schools in 50 different states. In the second article, the professional world of the school principal was presented in more detail, illustrating the multiple pressures that impact the principal and the execution of his duties. The list of essential gifts of the successful principal is long and breathtaking.

Following a typical schedule, this third article will illustrate an exemplary day in the professional life of an American school principal. Where this day occurs matters little: the demands of supervisors, faculty, and the community are incredibly similar. Although it is true that there are regional differences which impact the sorts of the issues, what demands their attention are predictably categorized. Spending this representative day clearly illustrates the extensive capacity and endurance required by today's profession. In short, school principals who remain successfully in their profession demonstrate an expert ability to adapt to the changing world around them.

1. The day gets going

It's Monday. Waking up late, Jessica Morales-Smith awoke at 5:45. She was delayed getting to bed last night because she had spoken with Ms. Sheldon, a member of her school district's school board. Sheldon had called Morales-Smith to talk about an event in the community where the school is located.

She gets up and enters the kitchen looking for the coffee maker. While preparing the life-giving drink, she looks at the texts on her cell phone.

has two cell phones: one personal and the other for being an educational director. It's one of the first lessons she learned when she took office four years ago: principals should separate their personal life from public life as much as possible. She had also stopped using FaceBook because of the harsh criticism she suffered after putting a photo with a glass of wine in her hand, enjoying an elegant dinner with some friends. A few people had hinted to a supervisor that she drinks too much.

Morales-Smith's husband, Adam Smith, was still in bed. He is a manager for a large real estate agency. Every day he gets up after his wife because he doesn't need get to work until 9:00, with plenty of time to get their two children ready for school. Adam believes that his workmates who arrive early don't have the respect of others. He has said to his wife a thousand times, "Why are you sticking with this suffocating career? It kills you. You would do very well in our company – working less and earning double the salary." Jessica listens to him without answering; he already knows his answer. His desire to be able to change the lives of those at her school is powerful (Goodwin, 2018).

Swallowing most of her cup of strong coffee, Jessica hurries out the door at 6:30, chewing the last bite of a croissant. The 20 minutes to get to her school fly like five. Adam looks for the newspaper on the kitchen table. The race has begun.

While driving, Jessica listens to the news on the car radio. She learned years ago that local events can have an immediate impact on her school. She relaxes. Of the three murders over the weekend, none occurred in the neighborhoods of her school.

It's Monday. Morales-Smith likes to arrive at the center at 7:00 every day, especially at the beginning of the week. She knows that the way you start a week impacts the whole week: if you start well, it goes well. Mondays are when she has her weekly Leadership Team meeting to plan the rest of the week. The three assistant principals, three counselors and her administrative assistant, comprise the Team. Her cell phone notification reminds her to stop by a coffee shop to pick up a dozen pastries; today it's Jessica's turn to bring them.

2. *The first surprise*

Morales-Smith parks her car in his plaza at the main entrance of the school. Getting out of her car with the briefcase in one hand and the pastry bag in the other, she discerns a woman with a child waiting at the locked door of the school. Approaching, she realizes that she recognizes the son, Jason, a seventh grader.

He greets both visitors and the mother bursts out saying that a handful of boys attacked the son yesterday in their neighborhood. Jason seems embarrassed; his injuries are fresh, noticeable.

The three enter and Jessica tells her assistant Sandra to continue with the preparation of the Team meeting. As she prepares the conference room table,

Morales-Smith sits in her office with mother and son and assures her that she will do as much possible. The mother relaxes a little, as she is in private with the principal. Again, the principal listens to the detailed story as Jason adds information among his mother's excited phrases. When Morales-Smith informs the two that, due to the fact that the attack occurred outside the center, she can only warn those identified not to continue the conflict at the school. The mother comes out somewhat upset while Jason seems quiet and worried. It's 7:25.

3. *The entrance is prepared*

Precisely at 7:30 the meeting of the Leadership Team begins. Jéssica knows that punctuality carries power and emphasizes the importance of precision. The Team is, in global terms, diverse: of the eight individuals, three are male, four are white, three are Hispanic, and two are black. Jessica's heritage is Hispanic American, that is, half Mexican and half White American. Representing a mix of ages, the Team is a formidable and intelligent group.

The first item on the agenda is to plan the required drill in the event of a live shooter. The school district requires each school to test the protocol twice a year in order to be prepared. It's called "Code Red." There are several "codes" used for different levels of emergencies, for example, the "Code Yellow" is used when there is a possible danger, and all students and teachers remain in the classrooms until there is a signal indicating that there is no longer a danger (Houston County Schools, 2021).

The Team decides that it would be preferable for the Code Red drill to occur tomorrow because a counselor leaves this morning to participate in a workshop. Each member of the Team matters on these occasions; they are aware that all

counselors must be present because the Code Red drills always cause an emotional reaction in students and teachers. Because of the history of violence in American schools, even if they know it's a drill, it still triggers nightmares and anxieties in the school community. While acknowledging that drills are necessary, doing so increases the palpable anxieties of the school community (Slater Tate, 2018).

After discussing other tasks, the leadership meeting suddenly ends at 8:30. Everyone rushes out, grabbing their walkie-talkies and notebooks, walking quickly outside. Nowadays communication radios are essential for the supervision of students in an American school. They are arriving by the hundreds, waiting to enter the school buildings. In U.S. schools, monitoring students is considered a fundamental responsibility within the realm of teachers and counselors; they have to monitor the pupils at all times when there are young people at the school. When there is no adult presence, young people tend to look for problems and conflicts with each other. In other countries, this level of oversight does not exist; students behave well enough, without seeking conflict or the chance to do harm (Bliesner and Armes, 2022).

4. The bell rules

At 9:00 o'clock an electronic bell rings that is heard everywhere in the school. The crowd rushes in, scattering everywhere looking for the classrooms where they start the school day. As they walk noisily, educators are also trying to reach their classrooms among the excited students, still keeping an eye on the students at every turn, continually supervising. The second bell rings at 9:07 and, if all goes well, formal instruction and learning begin.

In class transitions, Jessica always tries to get out in the crowded hallways of teachers and students. As a principal, the pressure of being a model for everyone always remains. How can she ask her teachers to keep an eye on the children if she doesn't do it herself? Jessica feels in her gut the harsh criticism that teachers assign to principals who do not walk more than a hundred steps from their office. The closed-off principal simply has no credibility with them.

Down to the scheduled second, the classes continue like a Swiss watch. The whole school day continues with a series of bells and classes, especially in secondary schools. In elementaries, bells ring less often. Principals say the school is where "the bell is king." It doesn't matter at all if the academic conversation is stimulating, when the umpteenth bell rings, the moment breaks sharply and the transition to the next class begins, hundreds walking, running, colliding loudly in the hallways (Jacobson, 2017).

5. *Wave after wave*

Today Morales-Smith wants to stay glued to the computer because a ton of reports and investigations await her, each like a shrill cry, urgently demanding her attention. Prioritization always challenges the principal. What tends to happen is that all supervisors of principal consider their particular requests to be of the highest priority; the anxiety it causes the principal and the demands from all sides are worsened in large public-school districts. The bigger they are, the more departments they have (i.e. more divisions), disconnected from schools that naturally have students. What results is the creation of an organization of silos, that is, departments separated from each other. Communication between departments essentially does not happen. The left hand does not pay attention to the right.

Before becoming a principal, Jessica received good advice from older principals who saw her as a rising star. One of them advised her that when a person accepts a job (the supposed "opportunity") at the district administrative office, she enters a somewhat toxic environment. To stop working in a school with students results in losing the perspective that resides in the epicenter of education: the teaching of young people. Without a student body, the needs of adults take center stage, marginalizing students.

Jessica stares at one of her two computer screens. Shortly after the first sip of tepid coffee, Morales-Smith's phone rings. It is her boss, the regional superintendent, Mr. Coppola. After greetings, Coppola gets to the point: a student from another school is destroying the entire school due to his terrible behavior, Jessica listens quietly, expressionlessly. She knows it's best to listen to Mr. Coppola's whole story before he responds. The regional superintendent wants Morales-Smith to admit the student to her school to give him a "fresh start." It seems that the current principal has just taken over the administration and is overwhelmed. Coppola reiterates the confidence he has in Jessica and that she is one of the most capable educational leaders. She finally asks her boss if, after a reasonable period, it does not go well they can move the student again so that he does not ruin the Morales-Smith center. Mr. Coppola sighs and agrees.

The call ended, Jessica puts aside her work with the next year's budget and asks her secretary Sandra to come in to her office. Jessica asks Sandra to notify the seventh-grade team, that is, the assistant principal and counselor who supervise that section of the students, to come to her office immediately.

Assistant principal Matt Livingston and counselor Lois Patchin arrive within five minutes and the three decide to arrange a meeting with the new family for this

afternoon when they can enroll the student and discuss creating a "success plan." Everyone is going to sign the plan, even the mother and son. Morales-Smith admits that this sort of fixing the mistakes of others is not the first time nor will it be the last. The two leave the office, thinking about the multiple events that will occur between now and the meeting in a few hours.

6. *The heart of the work*

With his iPad and notebook, Morales-Smith prepares for the favorite part of her job: the observation and evaluation of teachers. Her school has four administrators: herself and three deputy directors. All four are qualified to perform formal observations with the faculty. Teachers are divided into four equal groups; each follows the strict protocol of observations with its fourth part. According to the protocol established by the entire district – officially approved by the state after almost three years of meetings, quarrels and commitments – the four must advise the teachers that they will be stopping by during a particular week. They must not announce the exact day or time when they come; the teacher knows that he must be prepared in any case. Two formal observations occur during the school year. All administrators use an iPad to fulfill the observation since the observation software is located on the device. With the special app, they do it all through the center's Wifi.

Jessica likes this aspect because she has the opportunity to see her students and teachers "in action", that is, to do what lives in the heart of a school: the instruction of children and the personal interactions that result. After observations, a requirement of the protocol is to arrange a meeting between the administrator and the teacher. The meeting is professional, friendly and productive. They both as

questions; there is an environment of respect and curiosity. If confusion arises, they mutually seek clarification.

Jessica is lucky today: she fulfilled two observations before being interrupted.

7. *Politics counts as much as academics*

The walkie-talkie wakes up: it's Sandra. Without details, Sandra asks Morales-Smith to stop by her office or call her right away. Jessica recognizes the language: "It is very important that you come right away." Being a distance from Sandra, Jéssica calls her with her mobile. With more than 20 walkie-talkies, you can hear almost all communication.

She discovers that the town's mayor has arrived without notification and is waiting in the main office. Perplexed, Morales-Smith abandons her plans to do the third observation and hurries back to the other side of the school, a distance of about 200 meters. As she walks, the tech specialist sees her and asks which printer she prefers because the district is replacing all of the administrations. The principal chooses hers and they solve three other issues during the side-by-side conversation. To be able to juggle all the demands, a principal usually has these walking conversations.

Dyersville Mayor Johanna Murgio smiles at Jessica as she walks through the door. The principal is grateful to see her because they have known each other for years. Although they do not always agree, they respect each other and like to collaborate when they can. After a light hug, they walk together to Morales-Smith's office.

The mayor is to the point: she wants to have a town hall meeting in the cafeteria in Morales-Smith's school at 7:00 p.m. next month. There are many cultural changes

in the village and most of the changes have to do with the influx of Asian and Mexican immigrants. Murgio admits that there is a growing unhappiness in the village's established population with older Whites forming the bulk. Among them, there are many retirees and the arrival of people who do not speak English well has started complaints. The mayor knows that a town hall meeting will offer the opportunity to express themselves in an official format. Also, hearing an optimistic presentation from Murgio will calm the uneasiness.

With a hopeful face, Murgio asks Morales-Smith for her opinion. She admits the value of the strategy and grants the request. Jessica knows it will be another long day, another night without seeing her family before they go to bed. Saying goodbye to the mayor as she leaves the school, the principal considers which language she will speak at the meeting. Although she is half Mexican, she is not fluent in Spanish and when she speaks it she has an American or "gringa" accent. Many Hispanics criticize her for not being Hispanic enough because those who speak well consider themselves more genuinely Hispanic. Indeed, she considers herself neither Hispanic nor White: she is a person in search of a culture (Taylor, López, Martínez and Velasco, 2012).

Morales-Smith sighs. It's already 12:30. Without complaint, she turns energetically and walks to the cafeteria to supervise the lunch of 400 students, communicating at every step through her omnipresent walkie-talkie.

8. Free meals, but at what cost?

Morales-Smith arrives at the cafeteria — it's full of lively conversations and laughing out loud. Students relax when they get a chance to talk. There are four teachers watching the crowd; in other words, everything seems normal.

Jéssica knows everyone because she learned years ago that the highest priority of an educational leader is the quality of human relationships she generates. That's why she uses this time to interact with the students; she wants to be accessible. That way everyone can share stories as much as worries.

Morales-Smith stops by the kitchen to see what is being served today. A large portion of the food prepared in U.S. schools comes from federally subsidized sources. Among the rules and norms set by the government, they offer meals consisting of three elements: (1) a juice or fruit, (2) a main meal, and (3) a starch. Today's food is apple juice, macaroni and cheese and rice.

Morales-Smith looks at the many dishes prepared for her students. To her it seems like a plate of sugar and fat. He wonders if she would serve such a meal to her own children and definitely decides she would not. She calculates the carbohydrates and calories. With speed and experience, Jéssica concludes that this meal consists of about 1,800 to 2,000 calories. She knows that an adult human being who consumes more than 2,000 carbohydrates in a whole day will gain excessive weight. In order not to exceed a well-established norm, an active 13-year-old child must consume about 1,600 calories daily while a sedentary child even less (Dersarkissian, 2022).

Returning to the cafeteria, Jéssica leaves the kitchen. Thoughtful, she looks at her students. Half of them seem to already carry excessive weight. According to the school nurse's (each center has one) annual research up to almost half are considered obese before they turn 15. The precipitous decline in physical activity has been very noticeable over the last decade. Obesity data continue to rise (Center for Disease Control, 2021). The attraction of mobile phones – more than half of the students have them – has also contributed to their inactivity. As if that were not

enough, the faculty tells Morales-Smith that they use video games to stimulate interest in their subjects.

The walkie-talkie calls for Morales-Smith. It is Sandra reminding her that she has an appointment with Ms. García about her observation. Jéssica leaves because she must do something before the meeting.

9. *The post-observation conference*

An essential element of teacher evaluation is the post-observation conference. Essentially it is the official opportunity to be able to talk about what happened during the observation. Formal observation differs from informal observation by the number of minutes of observation. The latter lasts about 15 or 20 minutes while the former lasts a minimum of 40 minutes (National Council on Teacher Quality, 2019).

Before Raquel García enters, Jéssica gobbles up her yogurt while reviewing the notes of her observation. It typically takes less than 10 minutes to eat something; many days she skips eating entirely.

As a new teacher, Raquel is nervous. In the U.S., teachers do not call their principals by name but by their title and last, name so Raquel calls the principal, "Mrs. Morales-Smith." The American school principal does not teach a minute of instruction. Jéssica greets Raquel kindly and the two begin the talk. Reviewing notes, Morales-Smith comments in three categories: (1) what went very well, (2) questions about what she observed while in class, and (3) what Raquel can improve. The conversation is positive, focused on the actions of the teacher and reactions of Raquel's students. The focus is on which strategies can lead to better academic outcomes. At the end of the talk, they both smile and García gets up to leave the office but, before passing through the door, Sandra looks in with a look of dismay.

Raquel comes out and Sandra whispers to Morales-Smith that they have just received an report that a student has a gun at school.

10. Reaction and immediate action

The nightmare that haunts every American school principal is that of an armed person at their school. Of the countries that are not in the middle of the war, the US is considered one of the most dangerous countries in the world (Ledur and Rabinowitz, (2022).

There have been more than 250 mass shootings in the U.S. in the first half of 2022. It is defined by the number of deaths resulting from these fatal events (Harrington, 2022).

Insidious gun culture is found all over the country: the number of rifles (some designed for warfare) and handguns outnumber U.S. citizens (Lopez, 2018). Many states allow their citizens to carry visible weapons wherever they want, without any training. It is true that it is more difficult to get a driver's license than a license to own a deadly weapon (Kingsland, 2020).

Morales-Smith's reaction is immediate and calm. He directs Sandra to contact the police officer of her school (every school today has one), the assistant principal who has the student who reported it, and the counselor of the same grade, telling them to come to her office as soon as possible. They do not use walkie-talkies since they are very loud and such a request could alarm many.

Within seconds the four share the few details they have: a sixth-grade boy told his teacher that he had seen a gun in a classmate's backpack. The teacher immediately told the assistant principal, and he found the student and accompanied him to his office to question him. The boy had given him the name of the classmate

who allegedly had the gun. The policeman went out with the counselor to find the "gunman."

Within a few minutes the two returns with the student, the backpack in the policeman's hand. The boy, surrounded by four adults, including the policeman in uniform, sits at Morales-Smith's invitation, sweating.

Jéssica asks the student if he has anything in his backpack that he should not have at school. The boy, looking down, does not make a sound. Morales-Smith repeats her question, and the student looks at her, embarrassed, and answers the question in the affirmative. The policeman asks him if he has anything forbidden in his pockets. After responding negatively, the policeman warns the student that he will feel the pockets. Finding nothing particular, the policeman asks him to put the contents of his pockets on the desk. The student removes some coins, four single bills, headphones, and a cell phone.

Everyone watches as the policeman says he's going to look inside the backpack to see whatever is there. He puts on latex gloves. Opening the zipper, the boy says sharply that he has something inside that his friends advised him not to bring to the school: a water gun. Searching the depth of messy papers and notebooks they find a yellow plastic pistol, clearly a toy. Everyone relaxes; you can see a smile on the policeman's lips. But it's somewhat late: many sixth graders have heard of "the gun", and the resulting gossip races through anxious whispers in the hallways.

It's time to put out the growing fire. Without wasting a second, they all leave the "gunman" in a chair in front of Sandra's office and walk to the class where the silly boy was before being removed for the investigation. They enter with gravitasse.

Morales-Smith informs everyone that there is no danger despite the rumor they have heard. She admits to knowing that some have repeated the rumor of a gun at school. She assures them that it was a toy that shoots water and repeats it three times. She clearly says there is no gun or weapon, that everything is under control, and there is no danger in the school. She concludes that she will contact their families to avoid the possibility of unnecessary confusion and worry. She thanks them for their time and the adults – except for the teacher – leave the classroom.

Morales-Smith returns to her office alone, reminding others to return to work with their eyes and ears open. She informs Sandra of the result. Sitting down, she calls her boss Coppola to inform him what had happened. Coppola judges that the reaction of Morales-Smith and his team was magnificent and congratulates her.

Jéssica focuses on the next step: using the telephone system to record a message for parents. She reviews her recording and, satisfied, sends it to the parents to avoid more rumors. One of the truths of school principals is to tell everyone about significant events accurately and quickly. For not being the first to tell them, someone else may tell them, woven with rumors and lies. Looking at her smartwatch, Morales-Smith notices that the day has flown by again. It's 3:47 p.m.

11. Dismissal of students

At 16:00 sharp the final bell of the academic day rings. Everyone leaves the classroom energetically except for the teachers. Most students walk home or are picked up by their parents by car. Like a typical American school, Morales-Smith has buses that transport many students to their neighborhoods. The process of dismissing students requires exact planning that is executed with precision, using

walkie-talkies to coordinate everything. The image of having more than 400 students in a limited space can invite horrific chaos, but the kids stand in lines – each for their assigned bus – and when it arrives, the assistant principal allows them to board.

Jéssica usually uses a golf cart to supervise the dismissal. In terms of land, her school is typical with almost 40 acres (16 hectares), including sports courts (Sarfraz Malik, 2015). If a child does not arrive on time for transportation, the staff of the center takes care of him until a family member arrives to pick him up. Many times, parents do not arrive until after 19:00. It's an unresolved issue: if the staff leaves any child alone, the regional superintendent's office blames the school; if someone stays with the student, they supervise them for free because there are no funds to pay them.

Although most students leave for home, more than 30% remain to participate in the multiple extracurricular activities. In total, the school offers 16 sports and more than 20 clubs. Jessica is bound to come by the volleyball game this afternoon (or any other activity or sport). If she doesn't spend 20 or 30 minutes there with them to cheer on the team, it is noticed, and the players and their families feel upset. Today she cannot stay more than 20 minutes: a student won an essay contest and there will be the presentation of the award at 17:30, at the school board meeting.

12. The day goes on

On her way to the school board meeting, Jessica thinks about last night's conversation with Ms. Sheldon. As a board member, she is going to see her in a few minutes. Professional standards of the state prohibit board members from influencing school district staff. There is only one employee that the district school

board oversees: the superintendent. He has the responsibility of supervising all the employees of the district and that is why Morales-Smith considers that the talk with Sheldon was too much. Although he represents the region where her school is located, Sheldon must follow the communication protocol that is clear: that she communicates directly with the superintendent. Now Jessica has the dilemma of informing Sheldon that she can't take any action as a result of her talk yesterday. Morales-Smith will inform her straightforwardly that she will follow the chain of command: she will share the situation with her supervisor, the regional superintendent Coppola. Better to follow the established protocol than to violate it.

She parks the car behind the district building. As she approaches the employee entrance, Jessica notices that there are more police than normal. The district has its own police force to protect schools and the district's main office. All are armed with guns, some are wearing bulletproof vests. In addition, the street in front of the building is full of police cars; the image creates a defensive and aggressive environment. Jéssica knows the back entrance and passes her magnetic card in front of the scanner. The security door lets her in (Koch, 2021).

Entering the courtyard outside the large meeting room of the School Board, Morales-Smith stops. She usually looks around to see who is present; this way Jessica can anticipate her next move. The principal's career is, in many ways, similar to a game of chess. One move provokes another. The game board is visible but there are hidden sections; you need to realize all the pieces and understand their capabilities.

The preliminary agenda for the meeting is already underway. Board members take turns recounting whatever they want; some tell about school visits, others

share a pertinent philosophy. Morales-Smith sits on the left in the section reserved for those participating in the presentations.

At 17:50 the agenda finally gets to the item of the presentations. There will be nine this afternoon and her school's is the eighth.

After a long series of encouraging smiles, the spokeswoman announces the name of the student who wrote the triumphant essay. With the girl's parents, Jéssica Morales-Smith approaches the podium of the council to be recognized next to the family. Council members had already come down from their seats to clash hands or hug beneficiaries. Mrs. Sheldon whispers to Morales-Smith that she will talk to the superintendent himself tomorrow morning and not worry. Jessica smiles at him, relieved.

The time is right to leave the meeting at 6:25 p.m. Walking on tiptoe, Morales-Smith walks out of the great hall. He senses that a group of 40 or 50 people with serious looks have sat on the other side, dressed in equal T-shirts, most of them with banners. It's going to be a very long meeting (Talbot, 2021).

13. To the final stretch

As she leaves the meeting, Morales-Smith notices the sun setting. A policeman who is standing at the exit, asks her if she wants him to accompany her to her car. She decides to walk alone. So much has changed in recent years and she does not want to capitulate to the tsunami of hysteria. Jéssica recognizes the roots of the primordial fears that run through the entire country. Even with extensive precautions, the classroom can be violated by an armed madman. Nonetheless, she doesn't want to victimize herself.

She starts the car's engine and exits the parking lot. The 30 minutes to get home will give her time to think or listen to a radio station. Relieved, she breathes and relaxes, recapitulating the day. Essentially everything went well; it's a matter of being able to anticipate the unexpected. Over years of experience, Jessica has developed a sixth sense: feeling when danger approaches. For Morales-Smith, it's like being able to feel the conditions before a tornado strikes.

Morales-Smith can't imagine doing any other job. The sense of satisfaction is palpable; because of her, the doors of opportunity open for others because of her actions and decisions. It is she who can facilitate the implementation of innovations, new standards, and well-being. It is the daily uncertainty that is the attraction; it is the confidence of possessing the ability to be able to solve difficult events for her community. She is attracted to the fact that she is the boss – basically her school is hers. But it really has nothing to do with selfishness. When the powerful reward her, it comes as a benevolent nuisance; satisfaction comes when others gain through her actions, creating more opportunities, and directly supporting their efforts.

Her cell phone rings. It is his youngest son, Jonathan. He informs Morales-Smith that he has a project at his school and must bring certain materials to be prepared. He just remembered and doesn't have them at home. Jessica asks him when he needs to bring them to school.

Tomorrow, he replies.

CONCLUSION

Jéssica Morales-Smith's day has been a fictional story, but it contains no exaggeration or embellishment. In all 50 states, this account typifies the 12- or 14-hour days (some more) of the American principal. Throughout the endless days, the talents required include patience, the ability to maintain a vision, an intrinsic appreciation of human relationships and entrepreneurial desire, among many more. The torrent of events and decisions would frighten a private sector entrepreneur. However, the kind of person seeking the career of school principal is, frankly, exceptional. As has been said, "it's not for everyone."

The school principal career in the U.S. appeals to educators looking for a job that mixes the following: expansive power, daily uncertainty, and constant activity. In addition, that professional must be able to withstand the relentless risks combined with the satisfaction of coordinating an active community, a combination of children with dubious self-control, continuously worried parents and stressed teachers. Everyone admires with disbelief a principal who can, despite everything, remain calm in the eye of the hurricane.

Although there is a decline in candidates (Kurtz, 2020), many still want to embrace the opportunity to be head of a K-12 school. This desire resides in the heart of the natural educator who knows, with students and parents longingly in search of a visionary leader, that there are possible triumphs. Despite the valleys and peaks, there are teachers who want to impact entire communities, not just classes of students. For them, the appeal of stepping into the domain of administration will continue. While there are schools, there will be those who look for the opportunity to take the wheel.

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