

AUDIO TRANSCRIPT

“Ayers Institute Lunch & Learn” Podcast

Episode 16 – June 2018

Title: *Hiring High-Quality Educators*

SPEAKERS

JO	Julia Osteen	Technology Integration Specialist, Ayers Institute for Teacher Learning & Innovation
RM	Rachael Milligan	Assistant Dean, College of Education at Lipscomb University and Managing Director, Ayers Institute for Teacher Learning & Innovation
AW	Aimee Wyatt	Career Academy Leadership Consultant with the Southern Regional Education Board

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INTRODUCTION:

AW: When we’re looking at performance-based hiring, the number one thing we want to know is “can they fulfil what we’ve set forth in the requirements of this position?”

A lot of times, people like to say "Hey I'm really good at first impressions. I know as soon as somebody walks in the door if they're gonna be a fit here." Well you might think that, but you don't always know that.

I start by asking the candidate what is your most significant experience and really allowing them to show the depth and breadth of what they have to offer. Because, everything comes out in that one question

JO: Welcome to the "Ayers Lunch and Learn" podcast presented by the Ayers Institute for Teacher Learning & Innovation at Lipscomb University where we're all about education. These podcast episodes are sponsored by Edsouth which promotes interest and awareness of higher education opportunities to students, families, and schools. Each Ayers Lunch and Learn podcast episode provides bite-sized portions of professional learning.

Today's topic is "hiring high-quality educators." We'd love to hear your thoughts on this topic as well using the Twitter hashtags #AyersLunchAndLearn and #HiringQuality. My name is Julia Osteen and I'm the Technology Integration Specialist for the Ayers Institute. Participating in our conversation today is Dr. Aimee Wyatt of the Southern Regional Education Board and Dr. Rachael Milligan of the Ayers Institute for Teacher Learning & Innovation.

JO: Welcome.

EPISODE BODY:

RM: Thank you Julia, and welcome Dr. Wyatt.

My name is Rachel and I'm just so excited that you're here to talk about hiring high-quality educators today. That's such an important topic. It's so vital to the role of a leader. And I'm just really interested to hear what you have to say and engage in some really interesting and important conversation with you.

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So first, I'd love for you to share a little bit about your background and your role in education. And what's kind of led you to the point where you are today?

AW: Thank you Rachel. I really enjoyed being here today.

My background has been about 26 years in education now. I started teaching in public schools at the age of 20 and haven't stopped being involved in education; worked in both public schools in Louisiana as well as Tennessee. Most recently, I was the executive director for high schools in Metro Nashville Public Schools. And prior to that, I was principal of Antioch High School here in Nashville. I currently work for Southern Regional Education Board; and my role is that I'm a leadership consultant for them. So, I now work across the nation with districts and principals in helping them improve schools.

RM: Okay! Lots of experience in a lot of different roles; and certainly a lot of opportunities to be able to engage in the hiring process, at a lot of different levels.

So, the first thing I'd love to talk about today, and I know we've been able to interact in some different ways and work together on some different things and, I know that you are a person who values leadership as an action. Leadership in action and not just words, not just theory. So, I'd love for you to speak to that a little bit and talk about what that means to you.

F5: Sure. I feel truly that the leader has to emulate exactly what they want to expect. So, if we're talking about hiring high-quality educators in the building, then you have to model those talents that you want to see. So, as a leader in the building, I would expect that someone who wants to hire quality people and attract quality people, would exhibit initiative, would exhibit self-motivation, a hard work ethic, drive, ambition, commitment, and really that exude that lifelong learning and always wanting to grow and work towards what's best for students.

So, as the leader in the building, you attract exactly what you promote. You know my mother always told me "You're very much like the company you keep." And if you want to keep excellent teachers in your building, then you need to be the first one who can show them what that standard looks like. We know that "high-quality teachers" is the number one factor in student achievement, but closely followed by high-quality leaders. And I think that when teachers are looking for places to go— because they have lots of choices to go for a place to work— one of the first things they want to know is what is that leader like. What is that principal like? And if a principal can understand how people are looking for jobs— how those teachers are choosing (Why are they choosing school A vs school B?)— then the principal can really decide to promote their school in a very specific way, and they can really talk to the applicants about what your school has to offer and what your leadership has to offer them, as compared to other places they might want to look at working.

RM: What's one way that a leader can promote their school as the best place to work?

AW: Well first of all, word of mouth is everything, especially in a large school system. So, teachers talk. Teachers have friends at other buildings. And the first thing they want to know is, "Do you like where you teach?" And I think that's the first thing you can do is recruit via talent that you already have in the building. You know they can say, "Well my principal allows us to do this" and "We really have a great distributed leadership system" and "We're allowed to think outside the box and take risks and it's okay". Then you're going to attract those types of teachers, as well. They're going to want to come to your school and really see that it has benefits of being there, compared to going somewhere else.

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RM: So, engaging in the team you already have to recruit more of those high-quality people to work alongside that team.

AW: I think that's the most important thing, when it comes to modeling those skills; is you can recruit others without even almost trying in a way, because they're going to want to be a part of that team. Because if the team is happy and the team likes working there, everyone's going to want to come.

RM: Okay. Well thank you!

Let's talk about the interview process itself. What are some best practices? If I'm a first-year principal, and I want to really dive into what those best practices are: what would you say are the best practices of the hiring process?

AW: I think first and foremost it's a collaborative process. I think a lot of times principals get caught up in summer months and last minute hiring and, so they end up doing it very isolated. But actually, hiring quality teachers happens early on. It happens all year round, sometimes, because you're always looking and it is a collaborative process. I was very fortunate myself as a teacher to be able to be on a team of teachers hiring other teachers. And I think that experience really opened my eyes to the importance of having that input from other people in the building.

The second part of that, I think, is making sure that we are doing performance based hiring vs. behavior based hiring. A lot of times, people like to say "Hey I'm really good at first impressions, I know as soon as somebody walks in the door if they're gonna be a fit here." Well you might think that, but you don't always know that and a lot of those decisions are based on those first impressions that are really about behaviors. What we want to see is, we want to see what is that culture of public practice that we're promoting. So, have we really articulated what is the position you're hiring for? What does that person need to be able to do to be successful? Just because you're hiring an English teacher does not mean that an English teacher is the same at every school. Or it's the same position.

In some schools, especially the schools that I work in now, they're built in academy models so you're not just looking for an English teacher, but you're looking for an English teacher on a very specific thematic team. So, you're looking for a special skill sets. And every teacher that you're trying to hire, you're also looking at it from a team perspective. How do they fit in on that team? What kind of team player are they on that team? So, we're looking at performance based hiring. The number one thing we want to know about someone is- can they fulfill what we've set forth in the requirements of this position?

Three major components of that process are number one: classroom observations. Can you see this person in action? Can you take them to a classroom and get their feedback on what they see? You can learn a lot by taking a teacher into a classroom and having them reflect on what they see. The second is data analysis. Can they provide you with data and show you how they use student work and student data to improve student achievement? And then thirdly is really looking at what their students have produced. What is that intellectually demanding product that they've seen how have they? How can they show that children problem-solve and critically think in their classrooms? Those are some of the things we're specifically looking for in the hiring process.

RM: Okay! Great information there and very practical advice there, as well.

You talked a lot about team and team being important in that specifically, in that hiring process. So, team is key. I mean when I have worked with various teams, I know that the work itself is better when it comes from a team. So, talk about how do you go about constructing the most well-rounded team.

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AW: I really believe in leading with talents. So, I look at what are the current talents on that team; and, where is that void right now. What am I looking for in that team? Do I do have the cheerleader, the one who's energizing the team? Do I have the one that makes the tough decisions that really is willing to go out there and work hard? Do I have the one that is maybe the data analysis type person or the organized person, right that is the glue keeping the team together? So, there's all those qualities you have to determine that you want for your team.

And then I think, you're really looking for someone who fits in on that team that doesn't have the same qualities necessarily, but bring something new to the table on that team.

RM: So, when you're thinking specifically about the team, are there folks that you try to steer clear of? And I guess I'm thinking about, what are some indicators of someone who may not be the best fit.

AW: That's a great question.

I think the hardest thing that sometimes we can do is figure out, is this the person that belongs on this team and what is it. Sometimes you have that nagging feeling like, "What is it about this person that either is making me lean towards them or not lean towards them?" One of the look for is that I have immediately, is the use of the word "I." I did this. I did that. I accomplished this. I think some people feel that it shows self-confidence and drive, but it's really off putting. It doesn't talk about how you collaborated with others. It doesn't talk to the fact that you've been able to build capacity and the people around you. And that, you know, we all know there's no I in team; and so, we don't want that person whose ego is bigger than the team. So, I'm constantly looking for that.

Another thing I'm looking for, is the way people talk about relationships positively or negatively. The worst thing a person can do in an interview is they may have had a bad experience from somewhere else, which is okay we've all, we're all better people because of our experiences whether they're bad or good. But how you talk about that experience is really important. So, if you show signs of poor relationship building or poisoning the relationships around you, we don't want to see that.

And then lastly I'm also looking for the person, I'm watching out for someone, who might be what I call a reluctant player. On paper, they have lots of talent. They have content knowledge. They have skill sets. That's what we call it in quotes a "good teacher". We think that they would be a good teacher. But in all honesty, they're really reluctant to be that team player. They're really kind of isolated by themselves. And that's not somebody that I want necessarily on the team.

RM: Thank you so much Dr. Wyatt for talking about all of the things that you do now, and the things that you look for in the interview process.

And just before we close today, I just wanted to kind of take this conversation in a little bit of a different direction and think about what you have gone through your various roles and your various avenues to education. You've gone through a lot of interviews yourself. I'd love to think about and for you to share, how going through interviews yourself has impacted your interviewing process.

AW: Sure. I've been on both sides of this and all of my career; and I would say it is really impacted me in two ways. The first way is as the person doing the interview, I've stopped asking very specific questions. I think that when you first start this process people give you a list of questions, you know human resources, to give you a list of questions asked and they are very specific. I've now learned to really open that up. I start by asking the candidate what is your most significant experience and really allowing them to show

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the depth and breadth of what they have to offer with some follow up questions that bring that out in them. Because, everything comes out in that one question.

I think on the other end when I've been the one to be interviewed I think I have a newfound sense of confidence in that I used to be very nervous, because I wanted the job so badly. And now what I've learned is "what will be, will be. And it was meant to be." And there are so many things in an interview process you have absolutely no control over. So just go out there and present your accomplishments in a way that is collaborative and positive. And if they want you, they'll take you.

RM: Thank you so much Dr. Wyatt for this opportunity to be able to talk with you today. Are there any other lessons learned that you would like to share before we close out?

AW: I would want people to really think about as they are either being interviewed or you know interviewing. Do they know their own strengths and weaknesses? And have they been able to reflect on that in the process? Because sometimes, I think that we just don't know how we're being perceived.

Do you have a critical friend that can help you through that, to really help you? Because it's a process. And if you don't do it a lot, or haven't done it much, then you really don't understand the intricacies of what people are looking for (and what they're looking at) when you're in the room.

So, that would be the last thing I would just add: get a critical friend to ask you those tough questions.

RM: Thank you so much.

CONCLUSION:

JO: In our conversation today, Dr. Wyatt and Dr. Milligan highlighted the importance of leaders modeling what they expect, performance based hiring practices, and ensuring a team approach to student growth. They have certainly provided us with a lot to think about. A probing question for you and your colleagues to explore is: "What processes will your organization put in place to ensure high-quality educators are hired to serve all students?"

As we close today's episode, we would like to encourage you to continue the conversation on hiring high-quality educators with your colleagues. There is a graphic organizer file available for download as you continue thinking about this topic. The graphic organizer, along with links to articles cited, are found on eduTOOLBOX – at eduTOOLBOX.org.

Don't forget. We'd love to hear your thoughts on hiring high-quality educators using the Twitter hashtags #AyersLunchAndLearn and #HiringQuality. Also, follow and like the Ayers Institute on Twitter and Facebook @AyersInstitute.

We hope your appetite for bite sized portions of professional learning was satisfied with this podcast presentation sponsored by Edsouth. Look for other episodes of the Ayers Institute Lunch and Learn Podcast at <http://podcast.ayersinstitute.org/>.