

## **Beware the boiling frog (look after yourself)**

According to the popular website, Wikipedia, “the boiling frog story is a widespread anecdote describing a frog slowly being boiled alive. The premise is that, if a frog is placed in boiling water, it will jump out but, if it is placed in cold water that is slowly heated, it will not perceive the danger and will be cooked to death. The story is often used as a metaphor for the inability of people to react to important changes that occur gradually.”

There are two leadership implications of this parable. One is to do with Covey’s “sharpening the saw” and the other is to do with stress management. As we all know, sharpening the saw is to do with staying abreast of the most recent developments in education and, especially for Principals, keeping up with research, innovations and prognoses. However, the point of this article is to do with stress management and, in particular, being aware of building flashpoints that may signal an impending meltdown, albeit it temporary.

Behaviours and emotions are indicators of resilience or fragility. An awareness of how you are relating to staff members, in relation to how you usually or would prefer to relate to staff member, is one behavioural indicator and feelings of imposition, resentment, negativity or not being appreciated are strong emotional indicators of a diminished ability to cope.

Awareness is the key. We are all overwhelmed from time to time. This is normal but, if we do not recognise the symptoms and notice the rising temperature of the water we work in, our health and effectiveness are at risk. Along with awareness, we need strategies to lower the temperature. These can be as simple as taking a half hour coffee break at the local café or, in more pressing circumstances, taking a day off.

Taking a day off can often be in the best interests of staff and students. If you are irritable, unreasonable, short tempered and inclined to say no to almost everything, then it is definitely time for a day off. Step out of the water, maintain your dignity, keep your reputation as a good leader and let the school function without you for a day. This is a good lesson for both you and the rest of the school. It is a reality check for you, inasmuch as it emphasises that you are completely dispensable for awhile, and also allows the staff and students to have some time out, a breather from the subtle pressures of your leadership.

In a school, the boiling frog is an anecdote that either applies to you as the frog or you as the water. As the frog, you are affected by the system you work in. As the water, you affect the staff members and students within your realm of responsibility. Stay aware of both and use feedback devices to monitor both your effectiveness and effect.

By the way, frogs are actually smarter than people. Wikipedia also says that, according to contemporary biologists, the premise of the boiling frog story is not literally true; an actual frog submerged and gradually heated will jump out.