

At a glance

- The Partners in Leadership Programme pairs a headteacher with a business leader for a year.
- They coach each other on personal development, leadership and management issues.
- To be a successful partnership, both sides must be open to taking, as well as giving, advice.
- Business partners can be most effective as 'critical friends'.
- Partnerships are often the basis for further collaboration.

# One good turn...

When it comes to leadership and management skills, headteachers and business executives can learn a lot from each other, finds Angela Spencer.



**"I needed to know** how schools work. Anne wanted to know more about management issues. We formed a very good working relationship.

"We both have pressures – hers are government targets, mine are about money. Our problems are similar, it's the way we go about resolving them that's different."

It was in the summer of 2001 that Paddy Crabtree, Chief Executive of Print Media and Graphics Network Ltd, Nottingham, was introduced to headteacher Anne Grief through the Partners in Leadership programme.

The plan was for the pair to meet approximately six times in the space of a year in order to work together on issues relating to personal development, leadership and management.

The experience would give each the opportunity to see things from a different perspective and provide a

sounding board for new ideas.

Three years later, the partnership is still going strong. "Our contact is more sporadic now, but we still get in touch when we are going through a crisis," says Grief.

"I know I could call Paddy any time and say 'talk me through this one, what would you do?' and he would give me an honest, independent view. That's worth a lot."

Grief and Crabtree are one of nearly 6,500 education-business partnerships brokered by the Partners in Leadership Programme since its launch in 1998.

Managed by Business in the Community (BITC) on behalf of NCSL, the programme pairs headteachers with business leaders. An initial briefing session is arranged between the two partners, followed by approximately six meetings over 12 months, one every half term, to monitor and evaluate progress.

#### Leadership styles

The emphasis is clearly on leadership and personal development, but it often has

a positive impact on both partners' working environments.

Crabtree, for example, admits to previously being 'a bit bullish' in his management style and says he now consciously tries to deal with matters in the calm and assured team-working style he picked up from watching Grief with her staff and pupils.

Grief meanwhile has a better understanding of the need to call on more powerful leadership styles according to circumstances.

"When I started the programme, I was headteacher at Sutterton Fourfields Primary School outside Boston, having been seconded when it was in special measures," she says.

"I therefore had the luxury of being able to build my own team from scratch and we worked very hard for two years to bring the school back up again.

"But when I moved to the larger Long Sutton Primary School in Lincolnshire, there was an established staff and I

found I had to be more assertive in managing the changes I wanted.  
 "Because Paddy was totally outside the education system, I found his input very useful during this transition. In some instances I did try a more confrontational leadership approach, and it worked."

Another positive aspect was visits to each other's work.

Grief says: "Paddy became part of our school. Staff enjoyed his interest in the work they were doing, and he inspired the children, even awarding certificates in assembly."

Crabtree has since gone on to work with regional education and careers organisations and set up regular visits to Nottinghamshire schools to advise young people of career opportunities in his industry.

"I wanted to get involved with schools and promote the industry but I didn't understand how to do it," he says.

"Now I have seen the pressures schools have to swim with and the excellent work they do, I feel much more able to present my ideas in a way that will fit with their needs."

Business in the Community has nine regional centres employing 25 brokers who use application forms and telephone interviews to pair a headteacher with a suitable match.

#### Personality clashes

Of course not all matches are made in heaven. Occasionally differences in attitude, or just a straightforward personality clash, can cause problems.

"It doesn't happen very often," says Nicola West, Business in the Community's Leadership Director for Education and Community Enterprise.

"When it does we try to help the partnership resolve the situation because overcoming such barriers can be a positive

skill experience in itself.

"In some instances though, we have rematched pairs because skill sets are misaligned or the parties have different objectives.

"The best way is for both

sides to enter the programme with an open mind – not with their own agenda or with the belief that they have nothing to learn or nothing to give.

"Many headteachers have latent skills and business partners are often in awe of them and the pressures they work under. As a result the business partners are often less judgmental than peers in the education system might be, making for a more successful 'critical friend' collaboration."

#### Mutual benefit

West believes the programme is a catalyst for business involvement in other education activity, an aspect

welcomed by the not-for-profit organisation Heads, Teachers and Industry (HTI).  
 HTI Trust Director Roger Opie says: "The government has to make a clearer link between education reform and the national skills strategy. Schools need businesses to provide practical support, beyond cash, in delivering vocational education and IT skills.

"In turn businesses need to make school support an integral part of the corporate business agenda, developing resources and role models of people who can work with schools.

"Programmes like Partners

in Leadership are of immense help in working toward these goals because they promote both a shared understanding and positive relationships, creating the basis for and possibility of real action."

NCSL Assistant Director Meg Maunder says: "The Partners in Leadership programme provides headteachers with a unique opportunity to experience leadership in a different context.

"Heads value the opportunity to gain insight into the business world and they realise that their leadership skills are comparable to their business counterparts."

Business partners: Anne Grief, Long Sutton Primary School, Lincolnshire and Paddy Crabtree, Print Media and Graphics Network, Nottingham



#### More information

### Partners in Leadership

Originally part of the Leadership Programme for Serving Headteachers, Partners in Leadership is now available as a stand-alone programme for headteachers with more than three years' headship experience.

It pairs headteachers with senior business leaders to work in partnership for a year on leadership and management issues. For more information visit [www.ncsl.org.uk/pil](http://www.ncsl.org.uk/pil)

For more information on programmes offered by HTI visit [www.hti.org.uk](http://www.hti.org.uk)