

Attack the Administration in Print

(Sunday Opinion Page, *Tri-City News*)

Hank Hibachi, the principal at Highway Junior High School, is doing a terrible job. For years, you have been receiving and chronicling complaints from parents and staff, and you had several bad run-ins with him when your own kids attended Highway Junior High. Lately, things have gone from bad to worse-and you have systematically collected the evidence to prove it. This man needs to be fired for the sake of the district, and you are proud of yourself for being so vigilant on the district's behalf.

When you take your case to Superintendent Debbie Dineson, she is surprised and a little taken aback. She says she will look into it, but you sense that she has no intention of firing Hank. Sitting in her office as she puts you off, you can feel your temper rising. The case is clear. Why won't she acknowledge your rock-solid evidence and get rid of this absolutely terrible principal?

"Okay, if you won't do anything about it, I will," you say as you storm out of Debbie Dineson's office.

You go home and compose a letter to the editor for your local newspaper, *Tri-City News*. You carefully lay out all the many blunders that Hank Hibachi has committed during his 5-year stint as principal of Highway Junior High School. As you read over your letter, you feel satisfied. This has been a therapeutic activity for you. Your little essay is clear, concise, and convincing. You read it over one last time, and send it off by e-mail to the editorial office of the newspaper. You still feel a measure of simmering anger and satisfaction at the same time. You are a proactive school board member, and now the community will see that.

On Saturday, you open the *Tri-City News* and see that your letter has been printed as a guest editorial in a prime spot on the editorial page. You certainly have become the community leader you wanted to be when you ran for the board, you tell yourself. This will create community pressure on the superintendent to fire a terrible principal, and you will have won this battle.

Almost immediately, your telephone starts ringing, and the e-mail messages start rolling in. You get calls and e-mails from a few people who disagree with you and a few who agree. You get a call from your closest friend on the board. You get a call from the superintendent.

Vignette # 4

The reaction is not what you expected. Your board colleague and your superintendent explain that you may have violated labor laws and exposed the district to lawsuits. Some of the other calls and e-mails show how some of your accusations are factually incorrect. You have the sinking feeling that your guest editorial has turned you into a terrible school board member.

You are right, but that is not even the worst part of it! In one simple act, you have poisoned your relationship with the superintendent-someone with whom you must work as a team for the sake of the district. By acting alone and by putting yourself above the board, you have damaged your relationship with your fellow board members as well. In short, you have hurt, perhaps irrevocably, the working relationship that is needed for the smooth operation of the district.



Discussion Questions

WHAT COULD THE SUPERINTENDENT HAVE DONE TO PREVENT THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEMBER FROM EXERCISING TERRIBLE JUDGMENT IN WRITING THE ATTACK EDITORIAL?

