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Life in the Hallways

FIVE-MINUTE ENLIGHTENING

It was my second year as the only school counselor for two small school districts in southern Idaho. The first year had been a good one, and people were happy with my work. Being the first school counselor either district had ever hired made everything new and challenging, and people were grateful for everything I did. But even with the success there were feelings of frustration. I was making a difference with some students, but most seemed out of reach. Plenty of credit was coming my way for counseling students, scheduling, records management, letters of reference, standardized testing, and other organizational activities, but that hardly made a dent in the needs of the majority of students and the school as a whole.

The students I saw were either very conniving at getting out of class or they were the worst problems who the teachers wanted out of class anyway. I felt isolated in the office, controlled by my environment, depressed, and I was thinking about looking for another job. There was just too much to do and no way I could see to make the impact I wanted.

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One day, in the midst of what was becoming a regular state of depression, a teacher left a note asking to see me between periods. I never got to the teacher during my first try that day. A basketball player stopped me to say, "Great game last night, wasn't it? It meant a lot to see you out there supporting us." Another student I had never met asked about taking the ACT test. I patted a shy boy on the back just walking by and got a great smile for some contact we both appreciated. A new student waved for my attention asking if I would talk with her first-grade sister who was still frightened about coming to her new school. I was feeling important, cared about, and successful.

Nearly out of time to connect with the teacher between classes, I encountered more distractions. Two older boys seemed to be threatening a smaller boy, so I casually walked near, but not toward them, to draw their attention away from the brewing problem. It worked and they all moved on as I gave them a smile. One last approach by a student council member, who wanted to know if I could help with a problem the students were having with the principal, finally ended any possibility of seeing the teacher.

This one five-minute break between periods gave me more productive contact with more students than I had experienced the rest of the morning. All my best tools and training were put to use in these brief interactions. I listened, observed, gained understanding, provided support, modeled positive behaviors, offered quality advice when asked, and actually got invited into problems and issues that seemed critical to both individuals and the whole school. Even more important that particular day was the positive feedback I received about my work and myself. It was more than I had felt in a month! There was clearly something here that had been missing, and I wanted more of it on a daily basis.

This was not my first experience with being productive in the hallways of schools, playgrounds, and businesses; but never had I personally needed it more or recognized it so clearly. Perhaps that is why this one situation sticks with me

and why the concepts of hallway helping have become so important to me. The counseling office is a wonderful place where great individual progress can be made. I love that work, but have come to realize that it has its limitations because it is also work in isolation. In order to have the larger influence on the school and community that is promoted by the American School Counselor Association and other entities it takes much more. Expanding that influence demands multiple brief, challenging, and supportive contacts. These are the contacts that take place in hallways, streets, athletic fields, playgrounds, lunchrooms, coffee shops, and teacher's rooms and at community events and anywhere else that people live their everyday lives. These are the places that put us in closer touch with the realities of students, faculty, administrators, parents, and even ourselves.

HALLWAY HEALTH

The term *hallways* is a metaphor for time spent outside the formal and structured offices and classrooms that tend to define our official roles. It certainly relates to the hallways in schools, but has come to mean much more than that. The hallways metaphor can be any of those places where people go about their daily lives in multiple ways. They are the places where individuals and groups feel more freedom to choose what they do rather than following more formal behavior guidelines. Here they also receive feedback that is more about who they are as persons rather than who they are as teachers, administrators, staff members, or students. These are places in which we connect directly with the true human realities of individuals and groups in ways that can be supportive of everyone involved.

The ability to maintain a positive sense of who you are and the life you lead is generally thought to come from satisfying the needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Opportunities to meet these needs can be

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found in places where personal growth, meaningful relationships, and connections to a community are available to promote a sense of well-being (Kasser & Ryan, 1996). These ingredients cannot be created in isolation, but instead require a social context with a diversity of people to both support who we are and encourage new growth. The greater diversity of groups with whom we interact and the wider variety of environments in which we participate, the greater is our potential for developing healthier and more productive perspectives on people, communities, and ourselves. We get better at helping and teaching as we gain greater connections to the fullness of people's lives.

The full diversity of people, ideas, and environments needed for maximum understanding and growth can be found only in the hallways of life, while professional spaces offer only highly selective and limited life exposures.

Outside the classroom or office is where the most diverse groups of people meet in their natural environments. These are the places where people have greater freedom to make connections, meet personal needs, and develop relationships. They are the times and places in which we can help others while also meeting some of our own autonomy, competence, and relatedness needs. It is this type of environment where professionals have the greatest opportunity to feel integrated and connected to a community that can ward off the isolation from a diversity of people and ideas that are primary factors in professional burnout (Ghorpade, Lackritz, & Singh, 2007). Expanding our world outside of the office and classroom is good not only for those we serve, but for ourselves as well.

JOYS, RISKS, AND VALUE

What are the experiences counselors and educators remember? Many times they speak of the personal joys that they feel.

"At halftime of a basketball game a woman came up to me just to say thank you for helping her son. Her son had been explaining to her how he was making new friends since I introduced him to another student who I thought he'd like. It was a great feeling for me and I must admit that I liked others around us hearing it."

"It just feels natural and pleasant to be with the kids in the hallways where I can get smile after smile when I give one first. When you are dealing with problems so often, this is just a simple feel good for me."

But it is not always a pleasure to be in the hallways. Being in a natural and less-controlled environment means things can go in less than the best directions. There are risks in the hallways.

"Two teachers were arguing with each other in the teacher's room when I tried to step into the conversation and change it. Wrong thing to do! They told me in no uncertain terms to butt out! They didn't need my help. I was embarrassed and avoided them for two days."

"I stepped between two boys fighting and got a broken arm. Maybe not the right thing for a 5 foot 100 pound woman to do?"

It is not all about good and bad feelings gained in the hallways. Doing your job well and adding value to your services that couldn't be achieved within the limitations of the more formal professional environments is a major benefit.

"When I got a number of students involved in the local Kid's Day Celebration in the downtown area for the first time last year some really great things happened. Several of the middle school students who agreed to work with me were having behavior and academic problems.

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Teaching younger kids and their parents how to do face painting all day gave them a new sense of pride in themselves, got them baby sitting jobs, and things started happening positively for them."



"I was asked to help coach the high school volleyball team and the relationships developed there really added to other aspects of my work. I learned so many things about what was really going on with kids from these relationships that I wouldn't get anywhere else. Not only that, but often the players would ask if there was some way they could help with individuals in need. I was gaining counseling supporters and tutors for other students from a place I'd never have expected."

There are many simple joys to be gained in the hallways that will keep your professional and personal strength and endurance up. It can change the professional educator's work from tiring to exhilarating and even relaxing at times. This type of work also adds value to our efforts to support the psychological, academic, and career development of youth in ways that can't be accomplished in more formal roles and situations. But although hallway helping is less formal, it does require professional skills and knowledge to make it work, because many more risks are involved when you leave more formal structures. Much of the remainder of this book is devoted to providing ideas and guidelines for interacting professionally within the less formal structure of hallway interactions.

<i>Joys Felt</i>	<i>Risks Taken</i>	<i>Value Added</i>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Being cared about 2. Support 3. Sense of community 4. Acceptance 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Rejection 2. Looking foolish 3. Biases 4. Doing too much or too little 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Personal connections 2. Greater understanding 3. Self-understanding 4. More ways to help

<i>Joys Felt</i>	<i>Risks Taken</i>	<i>Value Added</i>
5. Confirming success	5. Overextending yourself	5. Breaking down barriers
6. Feeling connected	6. Abuse	6. Increasing communication
7. Learning	7. Ineffectiveness	7. Demonstrating commitment
8. Simple pleasures	8. More mistake opportunities	8. Becoming more integral to the community
9. Relaxation	9. Demonstrating lack of understanding	9. Wider recognition
10. Pride	10. Stress of the unknown and unexpected	10. Acquiring helpers

LEARNING CLIMATE

Hallway helping cannot provide the in-depth guidance or extensive counseling that could be done in an office. It offers inadequate time and control to communicate the extended lessons and remediation that a classroom setting can provide. What it can do is proactively support these more intensive efforts through the development of a positive climate for personal, academic, social, and career growth that all students need.

Research has shown us how positive interpersonal relationships and optimal learning opportunities for students provide the atmosphere where achievement levels are higher while fewer behavioral and emotional problems arise (Kuperminc, Leadbeater, Emmons, & Blatt, 1997; McEvoy & Welker, 2000). Results around other issues often only hold true for white middle-class schools, but in the case of school climate, similar results can also be found in high-risk urban environments where positive, supportive, and culturally conscious school climates are maintained (Haynes & Comer, 1993).

The more positive supportive and culturally conscious relationships people build within a school, the greater will be academic learning within a safer, more secure, and more motivation conducive environment.

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These benefits are not for students alone. Teachers, administrators, and other school professionals report increased job satisfaction with more positive school climates (Taylor & Tashakkori, 1995). When people feel more job satisfaction, they work harder to support colleagues and those they serve, making the outcome mutually beneficial for school professionals and students. We work better when we like where we are working.

Schools don't exist in a student and staff vacuum. Parents and the community also play vital roles in promoting learning, behavior, and racial socialization in schools (Henderson & Berla, 1994; McKay, Atkins, Hawkins, Brown, & Lynn, 2003). This is a two-way street; a climate conducive of their involvement is necessary to gain the benefits of positive parent involvement in the schools. One difficulty is that parents don't spend day after day attending school under the rules and expectation designed for students. We must find other methods and places to help them see schools as an appropriate ally and that requires being proactive about supporting and investing in them. We need to meet them not just in our territory (school), but also in the hallways of their lives, which will primarily be outside of the school.

The hallways of life for everyone in a community are important ingredients in developing a productive and supportive environment for students. Reaching out to individuals and groups is the only way to develop such wide connections. Current school practices set those kind of broad community-building goals for us, but how we go about it depends on recognizing the unique aspects of ourselves that influence thinking and reactions to hallway life.

EXPANDING INFLUENCE AND IDEAS

This second edition of *Helping in the Hallways* has expanded its scope and size in reaction to the ever-increasing demands on counselors, teachers, and all school staff. No longer can those involved in education operate in relative isolation from others.

An increasingly diverse and education-demanding society requires all educators to practice extensive cooperation and collaboration to achieve success for students of every ability level and cultural variety. These pressures have guided many changes in this edition, including the diversity of examples and activities appropriate for use by teachers, administrators, and all educators in addition to counselors.

Many revisions and additions reflect the emphasis on seeing to it that all students achieve the academic, career, and social success identified in publications such as the *ASCA Model* and in the No Child Left Behind legislation. Criticism of these efforts has often centered on how potential rigidity and impersonal implementation can lead to additional problems instead of the desired success. Expanded hallway activities, experiences, and reasoning are used to show how professionals can support the more formal aspects of these efforts and produce the vital personal motivation for students and adults involved in the process.

Changes in this second edition have also evolved from professionals in the field who have offered experiences and perspectives in reaction to the first edition. Readers will therefore see additional activities from my own experiences and those of other school professionals. Their feedback also communicated a desire to see important aspects summarized and emphasized in more visual ways. This guidance is reflected in some format changes including additional tables and borders that better highlight and summarize key points, activities, and experiences.

FINDING YOUR WAY IN THE HALLWAYS

There is no one right way to get all the benefits from the hallways. It always involves interactions between the type of person you are, the people with whom you will be interacting, and the context of the situation. Classrooms and offices add controls to limit the variables that need to be taken into account. Imagine a counseling office with a desk in the middle

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of the lunchroom or a writing class that was held outdoors every day, regardless of the weather. No one would suggest such arrangements because they increase the variables that would get in the way of accomplishing the desired task. But hallway interactions locate themselves in such areas where we have less control, more variables to consider, and importantly, more information available for learning and helping. The task is to become increasingly proficient at understanding the varied nature of hallway environments and identifying the actions that fit best.

The first three chapters are an orientation to hallway helping and how changing pressures require new models for education and educators. The inherent value in the hallways and beyond that isn't available in more controlled environments has increasing importance as more and different accomplishments are expected from counselors, teachers, staff, administrators, and parents. These factors increase the potential value of hallway helping that begins with the ability to assess how to make hallway helping work best for your style and situation.

Understanding the needs and how you relate to them in your work is followed in the second section, with an emphasis on understanding the process of helping in the hallways. It is a process with a common form that is implemented differently for various groups. Unique aspects of students, teachers, staff, administrators, and parents need to be taken into account while implementing the process and the specific actions within the process.

The variety of possible hallway actions is limited only by your creativity and energy. The final section provides a bank of hallway activities to get your creative thinking started. Some come from my professional school experience while others come from professionals who have reported positive results. See which ones fit your situations, and try them out or adapt them to meet your specific needs. Enjoy the process and you will find others enjoying and learning from it as well.