

(650 words)

## **Tune In to Your Principal**

*By the AASL Standards and Guidelines Implementation Task Force*

If you are a school librarian, how will you approach your principal to gain support for fully adopting the *National School Library Standards for Learners, School Librarians, and School Libraries*? How will you engage administrators in making your school library the “unique and essential part of the learning community” that it can be?

In *To Sell is Human*, author Dan Pink contends that “selling” is the process of convincing another to part with resources in exchange for something we have. Our job in convincing others to advocate for school libraries is to strike a balance between what they need and what we can provide. Pink advises that all of us are in sales, but that we need to replace the ABC sales mantra “Always Be Closing” with “Attunement, Buoyancy, and Clarity.” Attunement with others helps us to understand their perspective; when we are accurately “tuned in,” it helps us tailor our message to their needs. Buoyancy is a quality of persistent optimism. The perfectly curated message that starts a conversation is an example of Clarity.

To tune in to your principal (or other stakeholder), put their needs ahead of yours; use empathy, questions, and intellect to make sense of their situation; and connect with them through subtle and strategic mimicry.

### **Identify Perspective**

Through conversation, listening with an open mind, and observation, identify your principal’s perspective. Put his needs ahead of yours. Ask probing questions to get to the heart of his concerns and analyze carefully as you listen. In *Just Listen*, Mark Goulston says that we get to really know people when we get them to talk about what they **Feel, Think, Did**, or would **Do** (2010). Consider asking questions like:

- What do you feel is most important for students in our school?
- What do you think is going well now? How would you like to build on that?
- What do you do about your obstacles?
- What do you like about how the school library is working now? If you could change one thing, what would it be?
- How do you envision library goals and school/district goals aligning?
- What keeps you up at night?

To keep him talking, ask probing questions: Can you say more about that? Why is that important to you? I’m curious, how did you come to that conclusion?

### **Use empathy and intellect**

As you converse with your principal, develop empathy for her needs and perspectives. At the same time, observe and analyze what she says, her commitments to others, the context in which she operates, and the general environment. Pay attention to the mood of the conversation, be sensitive to nonverbal cues, and consider other information you have gathered by observing her actions. Follow up on conversational leads to establish common ground and mutual goals. Analyzing the conversation and other environmental clues will help you narrow your message and clarify what you ask for.

### **Connect through mimicry**

We tend to like (and want to help) others who are like ourselves, and subtle mimicry is a strategy that builds trust between people. For example, repeat your conversational partner's words occasionally, nod when he nods, lean forward when he leans forward. "Synching [sic] our mannerisms and vocal patterns to someone else so that we both understand and can be understood is fundamental to attunement" (Pink 2012, 77). Take care to use this strategy sparingly and subtly to make unconscious connections with others.

Being attuned is just one part of the process of convincing your principal to support the school library. See resources for administrators at [standards.aasl.org](http://standards.aasl.org) for details and ideas you can use to craft your message!

Goulsten, Mark. (2010). *Just Listen: Discover the Secret to Getting Through to Absolutely Anyone*. AMACOM.

Pink, Daniel H. (2012). *To Sell is Human: The Surprising Truth about Motivating Others*. Riverhead Books.