

The 80/20 principle at Work

By Lynn Russell White. January 2001

A century ago, Vilfredo Pareto, while tending his garden, determined that 80% of his pea harvest came from just 20% of his plant pods. As an economist, he determined that 80% of Italy's wealth was in the hands of just 20% of the populace. He began to notice the frequency of this ratio in other financial data as well.

The principle applies to most of us as soon as we open our closet doors. Do you wear 20% of your clothes 80% of the time? Do you find yourself reaching for one of several favorite suits most of the time? Do you briefly consider, then ultimately reject, the other outfits time and time again?

Perhaps its time – again – to simplify your selections, sort out what doesn't fit or suit you, and donate the never-wears to charity.

Pareto's observations apply today, and have valid implications in school leadership development.

In short, you can achieve much more with much less time and effort, resources, just by *concentrating on the essential 20 percent of your top priorities.*

**Graduating to
your first headship
takes a bit more
than a diploma
and optimism...**

About 80 percent of what you achieve in your work comes from 20 percent of the time you spent. Conversely, 80 percent of your time and effort typically

result in only 20 percent of your results.

Essentially, some of what we do accomplishes a great deal and much of what we do accomplishes relatively little. The answer is not to do more, but to *do less, and do it better.*

It's not how hard you work, it's how smart you work.

Test the 80/20 Principle in your own school life

The 80/20 Principle

Gratification:

Does 20% of your work give you 80% of your satisfaction?

Doers:

Do 20% of your staff serve on 80% of all task committees? (Think evaluation teams).

Results:

Does 20% of your efforts and time yield 80% of desired results?

Effectiveness:

Do about 20% of your staff develop 80% of the best solutions?

Fighting fires:

Are 80% of your headaches and heartaches caused by 20% of your problems?

Stress:

Again, are 80% of your headaches and heartaches caused by 20% of your problems?

Development:

Do about 20% of your donors produce 80% of your income?

Interruptions:

Do the same 20% of people interrupt 80% of the time?

Teaching:

Do 20% of the students take up 80% of the teacher's time?

Actions for Candidates

Figure out what you do well and what you need to do well. Then let go. Delegate as much of the rest as you can.

Develop your school leadership competencies:

- volunteer to lead curriculum development or other school initiatives
- serve on a board committee
- present at a regional conference
- write an article for your school's magazine or local newspaper

Focus on the 20% of the sources that are likely to give you at least 80% success. (Yes, The Education Group can help you here.)

Be there. Join the 20% group now.

- Anticipate problems
- Offer concrete solutions
- Bring other staff on board
- Take responsibility for the outcome

Take stock.

- Assess
- Prioritize
- Fix the problem the first time
- Reduce the 80 percent of activity that consumes great amounts of time and energy, but provides little in terms of desirable outcomes

In your personal and professional life, concentrate on the relatively few activities that contribute the most to your personal fulfillment.

Many capital campaign specialists suggest it could be as high as 10%/90%. The converse rule is that 90% of your donors will only yield 10% of any targeted dollar amount.

This ratio can be found in a disturbing pattern that is observed regarding differences in gender behavior: In any given exchange, men tend to interrupt women 80% of the time; men interrupt other men only 20% of the time.

This is as true of students with learning or behavioral challenges as it is of the 20% of students who answer teachers' questions 80% of the time.