

Our View

Proceed cautiously
on state sales tax

Because it's tied to property-tax relief, a bill in the Iowa Legislature to impose a statewide 1 percent sales tax to finance school infrastructure appears at first glance to be a silver bullet to help repair Iowa's aging school buildings.

The Norwalk school district has the state's highest property-tax levy to support education as a result of a heavy concentration of residential property that is taxed at only 51.6 percent of assessed value because of state-ordered rollbacks. It's hardly surprising that the proposal is getting a hearty endorsement there.

It is difficult to argue with the logic of sales tax supporters, who say a statewide solution is needed to level the playing field. As it is now, students in retail-rich school districts such as Des Moines, whose voters approved a countywide sales tax to improve schools a couple of years ago, have an advantage over retail-poor and student-rich districts such as Norwalk. As Norwalk School Superintendent Tom Fohr put it, "A ZIP code or place of residence shouldn't determine the kind of facilities students have."

In a slow economy and an era of huge budget deficits, even a proposal that raises one tax while decreasing another — the bills before lawmakers would require school districts to reduce debt-service levies to \$2.70 per \$1,000 of taxable valuation before receiving sales tax money for infrastructure repairs — isn't palatable to most lawmakers. An estimated \$200 million in new taxes a school infrastructure sales tax would generate each year would be offset by only an estimated \$132 million reduction in property taxes. Do the math, and it's not an easy sell to constituents.

Though infrastructure repairs and improvements are important, a perhaps more pressing needs is the restoration of state aid to schools that funds teachers and classroom supplies. A 4.3 percent budget cut last year riddled school budgets, and the possibility of another \$120 million in cuts to balance the state's budget leaves many administrators scratching their heads as they scour local budgets already picked to the bone.

And somewhere in the debate must be honest dialogue about whether Iowa can support 371 school districts. Rural residents argue that having a school in their small communities keeps them alive, but if the school light is the last one burning, how much vigor can it add? Can the schools in those communities offer a well-rounded curriculum, even in newly remodeled or constructed facilities, or would the students receive a better education in a larger consolidated district?

For all its merits, it's foolhardy to impose a statewide sales tax before those issues are addressed. ■

OPINION



"YOU CAN REMOVE THAT MILLSTONE... I MEAN FIRESTONE... AROUND YOUR NECK."

Bosses are out, managers as coaches in

There is a new trend taking hold in business today that translates into amazing productivity, results and a happier workforce. It's easy, positive, and some say transformative. Best of all, it's something you and every other individual charged with the responsibility for getting results through others can learn to do. It is coaching people instead of managing them.

Coaching is a skill, style and way of being that emanates from the root value of caring for yourself and others. Wouldn't you agree, you are more centered, motivated and productive in an environment where you know others sincerely care about your growth and development, not just what you can do for them? If you're ready for more success and breakthrough results, commit to mastering some of a coach's skills and characteristics:

- Create a co-active partnership with employees. There is no room for a hierarchy here. View employees as equals, embrace diversity and utilize dialogue and inquiry, which tap the knowledge of each individual, to develop strategies and solutions. You will find employees are motivated to contribute because they have ownership in the solution and an opportunity to express their unique gifts, talents and passions.

- Be a guide. Share your knowledge, experience, ideas and wisdom to support employees in moving forward personally and professionally. Understand that what worked for



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you may not be right for another and only what resonates as meaningful or insightful will be absorbed and applied.

- Use positive language. Words have the power to change your life and change your mood in a flash. Just listen to the words people use in the next couple of

days, notice what is being said on TV and radio, in conversations around you, and what you say. Explore the quality of your words and the energy behind them. Are they positive and expanding, or negative and contracting? Understand the power of language and use words that are affirmative and compassionate.

- Listen. When was the last time you were really heard and felt safe enough to say it all? Give your full attention to each employee. No multitasking, judging, rushing to fill the pause or presupposing an outcome allowed. Use your intuition and all your other senses to hear the words and tone of what the employee is and is not saying.

- Be honest and caring in your communications. Don't step over anything. Look for achievements to compliment and keep employees advised of pertinent organiza-

tional information and expectations; they need this to effectively do their jobs. Remember, employees can't change what they don't know — share performance improvement feedback in a humane and constructive way as soon as possible.

- Model lifelong learning and encourage self-development in others. You likely want more success, money, balance, happiness, etc. Chances are, your employees do, too. Support each in their individual quests to continually learn and grow to be their best.

- Build a strong personal foundation. Be sure the infrastructure supporting your own life is strong and healthy. Take care of any unfinished business from the past and don't waste energy worrying about the future; it may never come to pass. Live fully in the present, surround yourself with a loving family and a community of friends, get your financial and protective reserves in place, and make time for fun and self-care.

Imagine yourself as the catalyst, your team as the source and your company as the benefactor of greater productivity, improved working relationships, better-quality customer service, and higher levels of employee satisfaction and retention. Learn to be a coach in the workplace. ■

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