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# Introduction

To be a school principal is to be a member of one of the oldest, most respected professions. Yet, the role of school principal is a vast and complex one. Most parents and many teachers will say that they could never do the principal's job.

The role is constantly evolving and seems to require new skills almost daily. Being a school principal is a leadership position that requires executive ability, visionary skills, and particularly, management skills. Principals need to read continually to update their professional skills because they may be the single most important educational change agent in their school. More important, principals are the people in charge of the nation's most sacred resource: its children, its future. The principal with principles will survive and thrive in this challenging career.

This book gives many practical tips for the practicing principal. As you read the book, use Figure 1 to create your own list of top ten tips to add to mine. Because this book is a "work in progress," it will be revised from time to time. Please share your insights by leaving your comments on the Robin Fogarty & Associates Web site: <http://www.robinfogarty.com>.

To get the most from this book, you might want to just read it through, cover to cover. Or, you might want to read and dialogue with a colleague or mentor. Another way to use this book is as a guide for monthly discussions with other new principals. The ten principles provide great fodder for fertile discussions.

### **My Tips for Principals**

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**Figure 1**

# Principle 1

## Change Is Constant

*Positive Action:* **Know Where You Are Going; Know Why You Are Going There; and Know Who Is Going With You.**

There are a great many books on visionary leadership. They each present their own philosophical perspective, often accompanied by wonderfully quotable quotes. Yet, visionary leadership really boils down to a few specifics for principals as school leaders: vision, values, and visibility.

### **Vision: Know Where You Are Going**

How do school principals know where they are supposed to go? Well, it's really more obvious than you think. One of the great truths is that there are many "constants" in education. Consider, for example, these remarks: Change is constant; financial and political accountability are here to stay; assessment continues to grow; and governance persists as an ongoing issue.

In individual school districts, educators often take these "constants" personally and feel they are somehow punitive in nature. The fact is, these "constants" are universal. When envisioning a course of direction, they must be part of the map. Reality is that things continue to change, financial and political accountabilities weigh heavily, student assessment grows, and governance is a constant issue.

As a principal deals with these “constants,” his or her actions must be consistent with local board directions. The school principal is an executive of the school corporation and the CEO of the school building. As an executive with this corporation, a principal’s job includes being in step with the strategic direction of the organization. However, this does not mean that the administrator is a corporate clone. Board policies are the guiding principles or the “roads on the road map” that need to be considered as the journey is charted. These policies affect finances, politics, and governance. Board policies often reflect the culture of the community, an area in which many administrators, particularly new ones, may stumble. They usually have a good understanding of the corporate culture (or they wouldn’t have been promoted), yet they may fail to take the pulse of the community before changes are made. Although general principles, such as improving academic achievement and providing safe environments, are frequently the same, many social factors of “the community/neighborhood culture” can be significantly different between schools.

For example, a district may have schools in rural areas, high-density urban areas, established areas, and areas of great ethnic diversity. One needs to be aware of the cultural differences within the district (cultural as in a school culture sense, not an ethnic sense) when identifying the roads on the road map.

It’s often a good idea to meet and greet the people of the school area and to follow the adage, “Stop, look, and listen before speaking.” When principals understand the influence of the various cultural forces that may affect their vision or direction, they are more ready to incorporate these values into the implementation plan.