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# Preface

*Success is the sum of small efforts, repeated day in and day out.*

—Robert Collier (1885–1950)

Successful principals lead schools in which students are learning, parents are eager to enroll their children, and teachers clamor to teach. Successful principals are able to create a community of teachers and parents united in a mission to ensure the best possible education for all of the students. These remarkable leaders have an uncanny ability to successfully respond to the changing needs of schools and students.

The pathway to successful school leadership is a labyrinth. We recognize a successful outcome when we see it, but identifying the daily practices that make it happen is another story. Although the literature abounds with lists of traits and attributes of successful principals, how those traits and attributes manifest in daily practice is seldom described.

We wrote *The Daily Practices of Successful Principals* because there are few books that describe the strategies used by successful principals. We wanted a book filled with practical ideas that a busy principal could use as a handy reference. Information was gathered from interactions and conversations with principals in public and nonpublic schools from the United States, Australia, Africa, and Hong Kong. These were individuals who had been identified by peers and teachers as highly successful. The principals were identified by using a reputational selection process (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Since the reputational selection process is based on using the recommendations of experts or key informants in the field, we asked professors of educational administration, principals, and teachers with master's degrees in educational leadership to identify the principals they admired and believed to be highly effective leaders. The information was gathered through conversations with the nominated principals and with individuals who nominated them.

## THE BOOK'S UNIQUE FEATURES

First, the book is written for busy principals who need grab-and-go solutions. It can be read quickly and in any order. Grab-and-Go Tips at the beginning of the book assist readers in finding strategies that correspond with specific problems.

Second, the book was written by former administrators who know what the work of an administrator is really like. Strategies are practical, easily implemented, and based on contemporary best practices.

Third, the inclusion of insights gleaned from conversations with principals from a variety of countries and cultures and from principals in both public and nonpublic schools offers novel approaches and fresh perspectives, and addresses the multiple contexts in which school leadership occurs.

Fourth, strategies are accompanied by questions for reflection and step-by-step action plans. These important features prompt the reader to consider pending school problems, examine alternative solutions, and establish a course of action.

Fifth, each strategy is embedded in the literature with reference made to trusted authors and researchers. Principals are provided with an overview of related literature with references that enable further research into these areas, if desired.

Combined, these features offer the reader strategies that are supported by contemporary best practices and can be adopted quickly. Additionally, the reader is encouraged to reflect on personal leadership challenges and take appropriate action.

## HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

The tips in the book may be read in any order, depending on the needs of the reader. The table of contents and a section called Grab-and-Go Tips enable the reader to easily identify strategies for pertinent issues and pressing problems.

## ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK

The strategies in this book are organized into four parts—Personal, Operational, School Community, and Teaching and Learning. Each of the strategies includes

1. Tip Description
2. What the Research Says
3. What Works in Practice
4. Take Action

The book focuses on people and relationships, and is based on our belief that the role of an educational leader is primarily a human endeavor. Successful school principals have a vision for what a school can be, invest their time and passion toward achieving systematic school improvement, and facilitate change through a supportive and committed staff. The process begins with you—the leader. Thus, Part I begins with an examination of what you value and believe, the educational platform you use to guide your leadership, and your personal style and organization.

Part II addresses change—the role of the principal in initiating change, identification of impediments to change, and implementation of school change. The focus of Part III is the principal’s relationships with students and school staff: hiring, development, and support of school personnel. In Part IV, we discuss the most important role of an educational administrator, improving student learning.

For each attribute, we gathered a corresponding collection of strategies used by successful principals. Each strategy has been tested by principals in the field, has been validated in the research, and is now available for you to include in your repertoire of practices.

## **AUDIENCE FOR THE BOOK**

Designed to promote effective leadership, the book is packed with practical tips for (1) seasoned principals who seek new ideas and fresh perspectives, (2) beginning principals who seek practical ideas and strategies, and (3) university professors who prepare prospective principals.

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# Grab-and-Go Tips

*If the issue involves*

***Philosophy, vision, mission, image, confidence, emotions, work/life balance***

*Check out Part I: Personal on page 1.*

*If the issue involves*

***Difficult teachers, change, empowerment, hiring, teams, trust, appreciation***

*Check out Part II: Operational on page 43.*

*If the issue involves*

***Trust, relationships, context, populations***

*Check out Part III: School Community on page 91.*

*If the issue involves*

***Instruction, learning, professional development, teacher leaders, reflection***

*Check out Part IV: Teaching and Learning on page 113.*

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# Tip 1

## Examine Your Personal Compass

*Know thyself.*

—Socrates

- Identify your values
- Allow your values to drive your actions
- Act ethically and with integrity

Successful leaders are propelled by their values. They know who they are, what they value, and how their values motivate their behavior. Their passion inspires others to embrace those values and follow them.

### WHAT INSPIRES YOU AND INSPIRES OTHERS TO FOLLOW YOU?

Identification and clarification of personal and professional values give direction to life and leadership. You become more self-aware, make better choices, are able to prioritize your efforts, and are viewed as a credible leader as you master these skills. Individuals who cannot identify their values are indecisive and may change direction with each new idea or demanding person. Indecisiveness and lack of follow-through are indicative of weakness and a lack of leadership ability.

Values are principles or standards that support your judgment of what is valuable, important, or desirable in life. Once formed, values are the filters that guide your daily behavior. You acquire your values from a variety of sources: people who were influential in your life, parents, formal education, religious beliefs, entertainment, and life experiences. Values also reflect your generation, country of origin, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and the geographic area where you grew up and where you currently live. Some values change during your life as you reach different developmental stages and have new experiences. Core values, however, stabilize by adulthood, although they are subject to subtle changes and modifications throughout a lifetime.

## **INSPIRE OTHERS**

When we examine the lives of famous leaders, such as Ghandi, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Mother Teresa, we can identify the values that triggered their actions. They were admired and followed because they were passionate about their values.

Unfortunately, leaders with unscrupulous values have also inspired followers, underscoring the importance of identifying your moral compass before becoming a leader or a follower. As Coffin (1973) noted when referring to Watergate, “To do evil, you don’t need to be a Bengal tiger. It is sufficient to be a tame tabby” (para. 8).

## **ACT ETHICALLY AND WITH INTEGRITY**

Have the courage to act ethically and with integrity. As a leader, your values will be questioned and challenged. Sometimes the personal and professional values you hold may be in conflict. During times of external questioning and internal conflict, consider what is most important. As a school leader, what is best for students and student learning should inform all decisions. Family issues and your personal well-being, however, are equally important considerations.

Leaders who act ethically and with integrity align their actions with their values. They know what is right and what is wrong, and they do the right thing even when the consequences will be personally unpleasant or inconvenient.

Remaining steadfast to your values during times of conflict, criticism, and controversy can be difficult. Living in harmony with your values, however, is the path to a happier, more peaceful life. Acting in a manner incongruent with your values leads to tension, stress, and unhappiness.

Reflect on a situation when your actions did not match your values or a situation when your personal and professional values conflicted. How did you feel? What did you do to resolve the situation?



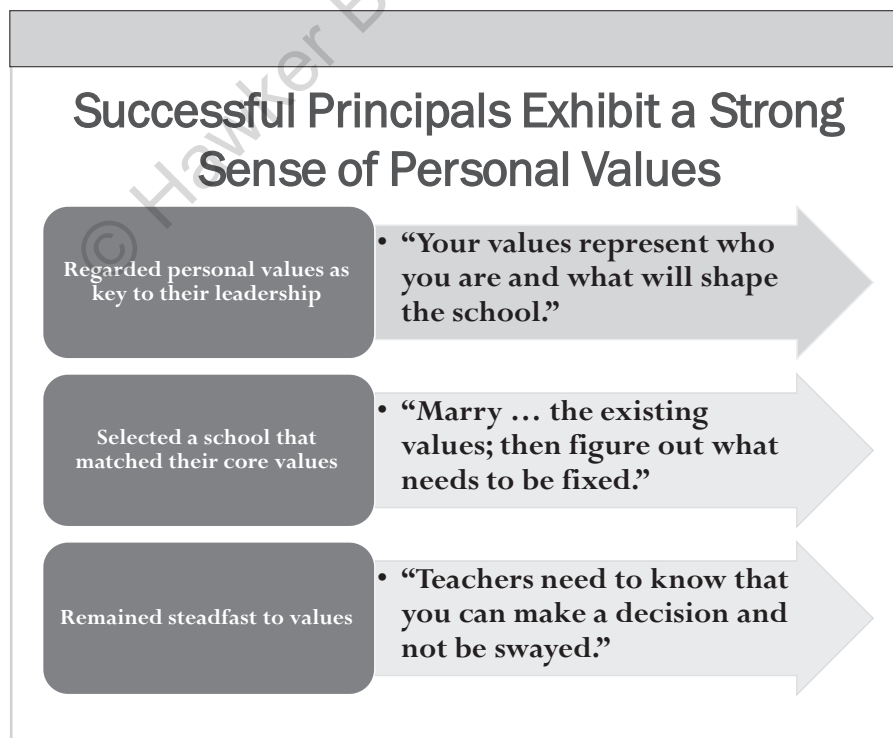
## WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS

Kouzes and Posner (2002) ask, “How can you stand up for your beliefs when you don’t know what you stand for? How can others believe in you if they don’t know what you believe? How can you expect others to be committed if you are not passionate” (p. 46)? They suggest, “You can only be authentic with leading others according to principles that matter to you” (p. 46).

Similarly, a study by Gurr, Drysdale, and Mulford (2006) revealed successful principals were able to identify a consistent set of values. Branson (2007) contends that authentic leadership might be possible only for leaders who have the commitment and courage to know and understand the full extent of the influential power of their inner selves. He further proposes that administrators need to engage in a structured self-reflective process to fully understand their inner selves and how their values influence their behavior.

## WHAT WORKS IN PRACTICE

The principals we interviewed were adamant about the importance of value clarification and adherence. Selecting a school where the philosophy was congruent with their personal belief system was important. During discussions they often referred to their values.



Following are administrators' comments:

Values are who you are and what shapes your school. It's a mirror of who we are. I never want to take too much credit for how things happen because it's certainly not just me. But the reality is, the buck stops at my desk and what happens is definitely a reflection of who I am and the vision and goals [we develop]. So it starts with me.

In one of my graduate courses we were required to clarify professional values and write an educational platform. At the time, the exercise didn't seem terribly meaningful to me. I had not experienced the role of administrator so I wasn't sure what I valued as a leader. I had a lot of lofty ideals, but few were based in reality. During the first year, however, the situations I encountered made me realize the importance of defining my values. At the end of the year I reevaluated my educational platform. I identified who I was and who I wanted to be as an administrator.

It isn't hard for me to [clarify my values] anymore. In the beginning, it may have been something that I had to grow into. When I started [as an administrator] I didn't have a clue.

I think administrators need to reexamine their values from time to time. As we encounter new experiences and grow professionally, we need to take a reality check on the alignment of our values with our actions.

Teachers want to know that you can make decisions and not be swayed.

Principals in nonpublic schools reported that they remained in their positions, often in spite of lower salaries, because of their commitment to the value of faith and school mission. One principal reported that she initially accepted a job because it was offered. Later she changed her attitude and commitment: "I discovered it is who I am. I have never wanted to go elsewhere."