Introduction

We believe that teachers are a school's greatest resource: the most important factor in student achievement and ultimately school success. We began our careers as teachers, spent a number of years in PreK–12 administrative positions, and continue our teaching roles today as university professors. We are advocates of best teaching and administrative practices. That is the reason why in this book, we write about a sensitive topic: difficult teachers.

We know from the literature, our own research, and our teaching and administrative experiences, that we write about a very small number of the teachers in schools. In most schools, there is a core of dedicated, enthusiastic, and generous teachers who volunteer for or are assigned more than their share of work. Most school leaders dream of having a faculty composed of enthusiastic, positive, and cooperative teachers. The dream, however, is rarely a reality. Although most teachers are hardworking, enthusiastic, and cooperative, faculties often include at least one or two teachers whose behavior is characterized as "difficult." This small but often powerful group irritates colleagues, disheartens students, and provokes endless headaches for even the most seasoned of school leaders. Left unchecked, the behavior of difficult teachers seeps into every aspect of the school, disrupting the teamwork required in effective learning communities and ultimately threatening student achievement.

Although you cannot change teachers' personalities or behavior habits, you can learn to influence teachers to change their own behaviors. Thus, our approach to the topic is a positive, generative one. We believe that school leaders can assist teachers in addressing difficult behaviors. Our emphasis is on what can be accomplished rather than on the barriers that prevent action. The ideal is to

communicate with them in such a way that they change themselves. By learning how to work with teachers when they are behaving inappropriately, you can defuse their power. The proactive approach minimizes or prevents the development and occurrence of unacceptable behaviors through positive team-building strategies.

(Note: For the sake of convenience and in order to depict what the behavior looks like, we sometimes use the term "difficult teachers." In order to understand the behaviors and determine solutions for them, however, it is important to separate the behavior from the person. In reality, people are not difficult; rather, they behave in difficult ways.)

The contents of the book are based on our experiences as school leaders, a review of the literature, conversations with teachers, and interviews with school principals. We interviewed and collected data from 50 elementary and secondary principals in public and nonpublic schools who identified the most troublesome behaviors in their organizations, shared their solutions for redirecting these behaviors, and suggested strategies for teambuilding. The quotations in the book are from the conversations with teachers and the interviews with principals.

PURPOSE AND ORGANIZATION OF THIS BOOK

This book will help you identify and adopt effective communication strategies for dealing with difficult, disruptive, and negative teachers. Your perseverance in changing resistant behaviors will yield a repertoire of communication strategies that will serve you in a variety of situations. In the process, you may discover personal behaviors that you wish to modify. Additionally, the book will help you identify team-building strategies that will minimize the emergence of negative and other troublesome behaviors.

Part I of the book includes the identification of problematic behaviors and examines the reasons that teachers behave inappropriately. Part II includes solutions and strategies used by experienced principals to redirect inappropriate behavior and reduce the negative power it generates. Part III offers suggestions to prevent the development of negative teachers and toxic subcultures by building a culture of shared leadership, collegiality, and team spirit; all of which are essential for successful teamwork.

SPECIAL FEATURES

Special features of the book include the following:

- Quotes from the teachers and principals we interviewed.
- A *Take Action* section, at the end of each chapter, guides principals to immediate "next" steps. These suggestions provide ways for school leaders to implement the material presented in the chapter. The action focus encourages reader involvement with the content of the text.
- The charts and assessment forms, found in Chapters 3, 4, 5, and 6, and in the Resources section in the back of the book, are key tools for busy school leaders. These resources move the content from prose to practice.

A FINAL NOTE ABOUT THE AUDIENCE FOR THIS BOOK

Throughout the book we use the word *principal* as an example of a school leader. However, the book is written for all practitioners in educational leadership positions: teacher leaders, aspiring school leaders, and professors of educational administration. If your staff is always cheerful, positive, and cooperative, consider yourself blessed and read no further. If, however, your staff includes teachers whose behavior provokes headaches, anguish, and sleepless nights, read on. . . . This book is written for you.

Am I Contributing to the Problem?

Oh wad some power the giftie gie us, to see oursels as others see us.

—Robert Burns

- ❍ Identifying your behavior
- ❍ Anticipating problems
- ❍ Monitoring your behavior

Principals, by virtue of their position, have enormous power over the work environment of a school and the treatment of the people who work there. Their attitude, demeanor, and behavior establish the tone of the school. Principals can create environments in which teachers look forward to Monday mornings or environments that contribute to teacher dissatisfaction and attrition. Principals can promote a spirit of cohesion and teamwork in the school.

When teachers perceive they are mistreated, the school climate becomes charged with resentment, hostility, mistrust, and withdrawal. Teachers feel compelled to hide mistakes and play it safe, rather than embrace innovation (Bassman, 1992). The

PART 1: TEACHER'S EVALUATION OF THE PRINCIPAL'S PERFORMANCE

Check the appropriate column using the following scale:

5 = Outstanding; 4 = Exceeds expectations; 3 = Satisfactory; 2 = Needs improvement; 1 = Unsatisfactory

Teacher's Evaluation of the Principal's Performance					
THE PRINCIPAL:	*5*	*4*	*3*	*2*	*1*
Values me as a person					
Respects me as a teacher					
Listens to my needs and problems					
Appreciates my efforts					
Treats me fairly					
Avoids favoritism					
Recognizes my achievements					
Encourages my professional growth					
Listens objectively to input from teachers					
Shares decision making					
Follows through on decisions					
Keeps promises					
Is trustworthy					
Demonstrates emotional stability					
Keeps personal problems out of school					
Distributes duties fairly					
Is visible in the building					