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MORAL IMPERATIVE AS STRATEGY

So the question is not just how deep is your moral imperative, but equally, what is your strategy to enact it. Just as moral imperative is not a strategy, neither is being “right.” We will see the strategies in detail, especially in Chapters 2 and 3, but let’s establish some basics here for making the moral imperative a strategy (see Exhibit 1.1).

Exhibit 1.1 Moral Imperative as Strategy

1. Make a personal commitment
2. Build relationships
3. Focus on implementation
4. Develop the collaborative
5. Connect to the outside
6. Be relentless (and divert distracters)

Make a Personal Commitment

Although, as we shall see, not every principal needs to be a martyr, not a bad place to start is George Bernard Shaw:

I want to be thoroughly used up when I die, for the harder I work, the more I live. I rejoice in life for its own sake. Life is no “brief candle” to me. It is a sort of splendid torch which I have got hold of for the moment, and I want to make it burn as brightly as possible before handing it on to future generations.

A bit overstated for our purpose, but it gets us in the mood. School leadership is serious business. It takes a combination of clear personal values, persistence against a lot of

Develop the Collaborative

Effective leaders with moral purpose don't do it alone. And they don't do it by hiring and supporting "individuals." Instead, they develop and employ the collaborative. Time and again we see the power of collective capacity. When the group is mobilized with focus and specificity, it can accomplish amazing results (what we call in motion leadership *the speed of quality implementation*). The collaborative, sometimes known as professional learning communities, gets these results because not only are leaders being influential, but peers are supporting and pressuring each other to do better.

This collective capacity is the sine qua non of whole-system reform. It gets built up within the school, but also is fostered as schools learn from each other. Focused groups large and small are unequivocally more productive. The moral imperative is a distinctively social enterprise.

Connect to the Outside

The power of the collaborative is seen not only within schools but also in networks, clusters, or other means of deliberately using well-led peer learning strategies. Again, we will see specific examples later. Connecting to the outside is essential for the moral imperative to have sufficient infrastructure. In fact, a principal's moral imperative is stunted if it is only applied internally to that specific school (see Chapter 3).

Of course, the outside is big and we will have to differentiate. The outside will include other schools in your district, parents and community, the district itself, and the larger state and national context. The moral imperative is systemic.

Be Relentless (and Divert Distracters)

Maggie Jackson (2009), in *Distracted*, shows in frightening detail how our ability to focus is being systematically eroded

remain as principals but widen the moral net, whether with schools within their districts or beyond.

SCHOOL LEADERS AS FORMAL SYSTEM LEADERS

The National College for Leadership of Schools and Children's Services (NC) in England formally adopted "school heads as system leaders" as one of its main themes. The NC is responsible for developing and supporting school heads and leaders of children's services throughout England. This is the organization's definition of system leadership:

Leaders working within and beyond their individual organizations; sharing and harnessing the best resources that the system can offer to bring about improvement in their own and other organizations; and influencing thinking, policy, and practice so as to have a positive impact on the lives and life chances of all children and young people. (For more information on the National College, see www.nationalcollege.org.uk/index/about-us/national-college-membership.htm.)

There are several elements to the program. One involves the selection and identification of outstanding school principals to the formal status of National Leader of Education. These leaders are publicly acknowledged and are available on a short- or long-term basis to help schools "in special measures" (the English designation for failing schools). They also are invited to give input on national policy matters and are consulted on other educational issues.

A similar designation identifies schools that have great track records of improvement and, after screening, are identified as National Support Schools (NSSs). In the latter case, the school head and the whole school staff are engaged

Exhibit 4.1 Eight Lessons: Whole-System Reform

- Lesson 1. The drive to make progress in our schools can't be a fad.
- Lesson 2. Education reform is not important to your government unless it's important to the head of your government—personally.
- Lesson 3. You won't get results unless teachers are onside.
- Lesson 4. To succeed you need to build capacity.
- Lesson 5. Settle on a few priorities and pursue them relentlessly.
- Lesson 6. Once you start making progress, you've got permission to invest more.
- Lesson 7. You're never done.
- Lesson 8. The best way to sustain your effort to improve schools is to keep it personal.

Source: McGuinty, 2010.

there is disagreement. In the case of Ontario, the core team is the premier, the minister of education, the deputy minister of education (highest-ranking bureaucrat, equivalent of the state superintendent or commissioner), their policy staff, and me, as special advisor. Thus, resolute leadership becomes an organization or system phenomenon—literally, the organization pursues reform and its results relentlessly.

In Lesson 3, McGuinty notes that it doesn't matter how much money you spend or how much you want change, you have to figure out how to build a positive working relationship with teachers. This is not easy. Given the history that most teachers and their unions have had with past reforms, they are naturally guarded about the current ones. In effect, resolute state leaders say that we have to figure out how to trigger and reinforce the moral purpose and responsibility of teachers because we can't get whole-system reform without it.

Lesson 4 taps into another vein of wisdom for the effective resolute leader because it concerns the improvement of