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Section One

Chapter 1: Why Look at Great Chapter 2: It's People, Not Programs

Understanding Key Concepts

- ◆ Although principals must have a strong knowledge base in their field, what they *know* about being a school principal is subordinate in importance to what they *do* as a school principal.
- ◆ The perspective of *What Great Principals Do Differently* is threefold and based on research findings examining effective school leadership; observations at and consultations with many schools and school systems; and the personal core beliefs that guided Todd Whitaker's own work as a successful school principal.
- ◆ We can always learn from observing what great principals do. Eliminating inappropriate choices does not help as much as identifying good ideas used by successful educators.
- ◆ By studying our most effective school leaders, we learn where they focus their attention, how they spend their time and energy, and what guides their decisions.
- ◆ No matter how good our most effective principals are, they still want to be better.
- ◆ No program inherently leads to school improvement. It is the people who implement sound programs who determine the success of the school. Programs are never the solution, and they are never the problem.
- ◆ Recognizing the importance of people over programs, great principals recognize that the two primary ways to improve a school are to hire better teachers and to improve the teachers already in place.
- ◆ Great principals realize that teachers—just like students—vary widely in their individual needs and abilities. As a result, no single program will work with the same rate of success for all teachers. Programs are only solutions when they bring out the best in teachers.
- ◆ In addition to promoting whole-school growth and improvement initiatives, great principals do everything possible to promote *individual* teacher development.

Selecting Questions for Discussion

- ◆ What do great principals see when they view their schools and the people in them?

- ◆ Why should we look at what great principals do?

- ◆ Why must we study less-effective principals and schools when determining what distinguishes those who are identified as great from those who are not great? In what ways does looking at ineffective principals and schools have limited value?

- ◆ As a school principal, what guides the decisions you make each day?

- ◆ How can you ensure that you recruit and hire the very best teachers? How can you improve the teachers already working at your school?

- ◆ Why do certain programs work so well for some teachers, but fail miserably for other teachers?

