

# STOP LEADING LIKE IT'S Yesterday!

*Key Concepts for Shaping Today's School Culture*

Casey Reason

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# I N T R O D U C T I O N

## *Today Is Not Yesterday—Get Ready!*

*This book is* devoted to helping you, the principal, challenge the absurd assumption that you can lead today as if it was yesterday. Simply put, you can't. Even if you were a good leader yesterday, the game has changed significantly, and you have to change with it. I have been directly involved in designing award-winning principal and teacher leadership training since 2001, and I can safely say that much of what we designed just a few years ago either no longer applies or the application has changed dramatically. This book will help you recognize how leadership is changing in response to a very different set of challenges in schools; it will arm you with specific key concepts and requisite implementation strategies that will provide the tools you need to successfully lead—today and tomorrow.

In the pages that follow, I'll be sharing a new leadership model that's called Leading for Excellence and Fulfillment (LEAF). This model is designed for school leaders with the unique challenges of today in mind. Furthermore, the model takes advantage of the latest research on human performance, learning theory, and psychology. The ideas presented in this book aren't just well-intended, home-spun pieces of advice. They represent the synthesis of a generous amount of research on learning and human performance that will help you shape your leadership behaviors in the most productive way possible.

What's rather surprising about this collection of key concepts and strategies is that, in many cases, it represents a distinct departure from much of the common wisdom about leadership from the past. You'll learn in the following pages that much of what you were taught about leadership was designed for a world of work that doesn't exist anymore. To illustrate this chasm between yesterday and today, I want to begin by taking a brief look back.

## The Industrial Revolution

Our traditional notions of leadership and organizational development in schools emerged due to significant historic and economic forces. In the late 1800s and early 1900s, when the United States was going through the Industrial Revolution, cities were growing, and work environments were defined very differently than they are today (Eisner, 2002; Gray, 1993). Frederick Taylor, a mechanical engineer, developed the managerial style of the Industrial Revolution; it was known as *scientific management* or *Taylorism* (Taylor, 1911). As you read the following list of scientific management's work expectations and conditions, think about how different the world of work is now from the systems envisioned when these models were developed.

- Employers valued compliance and consistency over high performance and differentiation.
- The work being done was mostly boring.
- The workers were poorly educated and had very low skill levels.
- Meeting expectations meant following very specific work parameters.
- There was a great need for workers to respect authority and comply explicitly with everything they were told to do.
- Workers had to endure high levels of boredom.
- Everything was measured by time. Quality was assumed within the confines of the routine, and time was used to maximize efficiency (Eisner, 2002).

# CHAPTER 1

## *Establishing Vision Clarity*

*We tend to* talk about vision in imprecise and almost mystical terms. For instance, we expect our school leaders to have vision, and that vision is supposed to provide direction and help the school consistently move forward in a focused and purposeful direction. What we've learned, however, is that having a single visionary leader is an outdated presupposition in an increasingly complicated world. You don't have to go back that far to find numerous examples of well-intentioned schools working under the assumption that it's the principal's job to come in and clearly articulate every nuance on the path to success. The old top-down approach simply doesn't work in this far more complex world where the choices are innumerable and the work being done by the professionals on the front line is more sophisticated than ever (Bush, 2004; McGregor, 1960). In the LEAF model, entire schools need to have a clear vision of where they are going and what they hope to accomplish. To that end, their vision must be so recognizable that they know it when they see it.

Sadly, many schools operate with great imprecision regarding their collective vision. Even if these schools arrived at their destination, it's conceivable that many staff members wouldn't even realize they had arrived. Why is it so difficult for us to reach clarity about vision? There are many reasons, but what learning theorists and those who have studied the brain have discovered in the last several years is that from a learning and comprehension standpoint, the process of collectively capturing a similar image in an otherwise diverse group of



## Key Concepts for Today

Leaders who excel in mastering this key concept—asking meaningful questions—understand that their schools can be increasingly engaged and focused in purpose and direction if the right questions are asked and answered with passion and determination. These leaders know that questions their schools ask on a daily basis reveal who they are, what they value, and ultimately what they are after in terms of change and transformation. Schools that ask unimaginative questions create a culture that yields the same. Conversely, schools that are passionately pursuing questions that define their priorities and inspire the imagination position themselves to transform into the type of learning organization where creativity is maximized and engagement and human performance reach a higher level.

The kinds of questions you ask can certainly vary, but what's important is that they are clear and the ownership of that pursuit remains by and large with the staff. In general, these questions are more powerful than a mission statement; we often can't remember a mission statement, but we can remember a short and engaging question. A strong question can also help you continually refine your preferred outcomes.

## Strategies for Today: Leading for Excellence and Fulfillment

Far too often, schools are too polite or altogether imprecise about what they're after and what achieving that goal actually means. We've all known people who don't want to declare what they want out of fear that they might not get it. Sadly, many schools behave that way too. To follow the LEAF model, however, every school needs to consistently run toward the things that matter.

The following strategies will help you lead in a way that makes this type of engaged curiosity possible. The goal here is to get your school out of passively moving toward one outcome or another and begin pursuing those outcomes with energy, enthusiasm, and purpose.

## CHAPTER 5

### *Developing and Enhancing Authentic Teacher Leadership*

*Teacher leadership is* one of the more overused and simultaneously misunderstood concepts in the field of education. To a great extent, this is due to the prevailing mental models most of us carry around regarding teachers, teaching, and the role of principals. If you believe that leadership is an organic force that can emerge and be celebrated in a number of ways, then we need to establish a more viable and comprehensive definition for what teacher leadership means, what it looks like in action, how it can be promoted, and how it ultimately is a key factor in creating a culture for the Leading for Excellence and Fulfillment model. As alluded to earlier, there are far too many situations in which teachers are unaware of the influence they have over their students, their work, their colleagues, their school, their community, and ultimately their profession. I have had the pleasure of working side by side with teacher leaders who have had enormously heroic and transformative impacts on those around them. I'll be talking about some of them in this chapter, and I'll be providing you with strategies for creating a school culture in which excellence in teacher leadership can emerge.

#### **Paradigms of Yesterday**

The best way to unpack our current miscalculations about teacher leadership is to look at some of the prevailing mental models that have made these less potent images all too common. During Taylor's