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Introduction

Deep, meaningful change in schools occurs when the sacred exchange between teachers and students is supported and nourished. That happens when the adults who come to work each day continuously strive to improve their individual and collective capacity to learn. By themselves, new schedules, teaching materials, and slogans will not generate change that lasts. Truly transcendent learning organizations are led by teacher leaders and principals dedicated to making thoughtful, strategic organizational learning a priority.

Many leadership books have used stories of model leaders to illustrate the path toward effectiveness; we've studied the habits and read about the successes of corporate leaders, coaches, and military heroes and have attempted to identify and harness their wisdom. Other books have taken the approach of offering theories and defining leadership practice. This text builds on both of these approaches by examining more closely the psychological and neurological factors that affect how we lead and how groups are most effectively led; it also identifies more precisely how we can stimulate the deepest levels of individual and team learning.

Advanced brain imaging techniques, unavailable before the year 2000, allow us to observe the brain in action and give us a new perspective on leading and learning. For example, we now know that it's almost impossible to retain new learning unless it's emotionally relevant (Shu-Shen, 2008). We know that, while the literature on leadership has focused for years on the importance of having and communicating a vision (Hallinger, 2003; Hallinger & Heck, 2002; Bass & Avolio, 1988), establishing a collective vision is a complex neurological process. We also know that stress and fear can stop learning in its

tracks and that leaders who use fear are actually impoverishing the learning environment (Oathes & Ray, 2008).

By taking advantage of the implications of these new findings for organizational learning, we can move past the distraction, fear, and stress in our schools to stimulate deeper levels of growth and creativity.

Who Are the Leaders, Who Are the Led?

When you think about school leaders, do you visualize the principal? Certainly, an abundance of research has acknowledged the principal's role in shaping school culture (Gross, 2009; Belmonte & Cranston, 2009; Karakose, 2008). Principals are often in the best position to significantly change work patterns in ways that immediately and effectively diminish distraction and promote higher levels of learning. Principals can unleash the awesome and often untapped potential that is dormant in just about every school. If you are a principal, *Leading a Learning Organization* is for you.

This book is also written for another emerging leadership force in schools—teacher leaders. *Teacher leadership* is a term we love to use in our profession but often apply inappropriately. In some schools, sadly, teacher leadership is demonstrated by visibility in the principal's office, where highly effective, seasoned educators set aside decades of classroom experience to work on issues like budgets and dress codes. Teacher leaders do not deny the value of these functions, but they know that the most significant work in school goes on not in the principal's office but in the classroom. All the efforts of boards of education, superintendents, support staff, and parent organizations come to fruition in one form or another in the classroom. By shaping the human spirit and finding the untapped greatness in others, teacher leaders redefine their school, their community, and the world.

The Steep Slope of Change

After thirty-two years as a history teacher, Lonnie was promoted to principal. A self-described traditional leader, he felt that the best way to honor the past was to live in it. As forces of change emerged, Lonnie greeted them with outright rejection or else derailed their

other staff, should not be regarded as the one with decision-making authority. Instead, its charge is to support skill development using the collaboration process. This team can resolve conflicts before they result in long-term dysfunction or diminished learning capacity, evaluate professional development and skill-building opportunities that might assist teams, create a sense of accountability, and inspire collaboration in ways that support organizational learning. Finally, a skill-building team can be a reminder to the entire school that collaboration is a key value and is nonnegotiable.

The goal of collaborative skill building might also be assigned for a year to a team that leads the creation of the professional development agenda or to a school improvement steering committee.

Step Six: Organize Collaboration Strategies

To organize the work of collaborators effectively, it's essential to discuss goals and evaluate the original justification for the group. Some groups collaborate with the intention of rigorously maintaining their individual autonomy, using the opportunity to collaborate in order to simply build up their own resistance to any type of collaborative approach! Other groups use their time together to reshape their perspectives and come up with a more unified front on change. Asking if the group is necessary and specifically pointing out what it is trying to achieve saves time and effort in the end.

Schools that have established values for the entire organization must include those values as a component of collaborative work as well. If values have not been established, they should be discussed. What does the group stand for? What does it value? What is it willing to do, or not do, in pursuit of its goals?

Successful collaborative teams also need a sense of clarity regarding the role of each team member and the value he or she intends to bring. One team member may be excellent at disaggregating data or seeing an opposing point of view. Other team members may have skill at using technology or establishing collaborative relationships beyond the building. A thoughtful discussion regarding what a new teacher, veteran teacher, or teacher moving from another level can bring to a