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CHAPTER 2

Leading Legacies

This book is intended equally for individual principals and for system leaders interested in developing the principalship. Above all, we don't want individuals to wait for the "system" to get its act together. Change never happens that way.

Leading legacies is one area where individuals can make a direct contribution to improving themselves, while simultaneously strengthening the system for the long run. George Bernard Shaw captures this magnificently in *Man and Superman*:

> This is the true joy in life, the being used for a purpose recognized by "yourself as a mighty one"; the being a force of nature instead of a feverish little clod of ailments and grievances complaining that the world will not devote itself to making you happy; 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. (1903, p. ii)

Leading legacies is about splendid torches that burn forever: School principals lead legacies in four ways:

1. They lead for others.
2. They develop collaborative cultures.
3. They link to the outside.
4. They leave fond memories.

LEADING FOR OTHERS

We know that effective principals have to do two things jointly: to focus deeply on instruction (Chapter 3) and help others do so in the short run and also especially to put others in a position to carry on beyond the leader's tenure. When there are urgent problems and one is expected as leader to have the answers, there is great temptation to jump in and solve the problem. This is not legacy leading. Ken Leithwood and his colleagues recently completed a study for the National College of School Leadership (NCSL) in England in which they offered "Seven strong claims about successful school leadership" (Leithwood et al., 2007). Two of the these claims bear directly on establishing conditions for legacy:

> - School leadership has a greater influence on schools and students when it is widely distributed.
> - School leaders improve learning indirectly and most powerfully through their influence on staff motivation, commitment, and working conditions. (p. 3)

Henry Mintzberg, McGill University's iconoclastic business professor, nails the basic case for leaving legacies. He starts with Livingston's 1971 article in the *Harvard Business Review*: "successful managing in Livingston's opinion is not about one's own success but fostering success in others" (Mintzberg, 2004, p. 16).

Later on, Mintzberg elaborates:

> Leadership is not about making clever decisions and doing bigger deals, least of all for personal gain. It is about energizing other people to make good decisions and do better things. In other words, it is about helping release the positive energy that exists naturally within people. Effective leadership inspires more than it empowers; it connects more than it controls; it demonstrates more than it decides. It does all this by *engaging*—itself above all, and consequently others. (p. 143; emphasis in original)

CHAPTER 4

Leading Learning Communities

We have already covered some of the territory on leading learning communities in our legacy discussion of collaborative cultures (Chapter 2) and in our treatment of teaching knowledgeably (Chapter 3). But let's sharpen the point with more examples of what it looks like in practice.

The research knowledge on leading learning communities has been around for a while. What's worth fighting for involves putting it into practice.

THE KNOWLEDGE BASE

Over a quarter of a century ago, Judith Little (1981) made the best case for how teachers and principals should work together to accomplish meaningful reform:

> School improvement is most surely and thoroughly achieved when: Teachers engage in frequent, continuous and increasingly concrete and precise *talk* about teaching practice (as distinct from [talk] about the foibles and failures of students and their families, and the unfortunate demands of society on the school). By such talk, teachers build up a shared language adequate to the complexity of teaching, capable of distinguishing one practice and its virtue from another.

> Teachers and administrators frequently *observe* each other teaching and provide each other with useful (if potentially frightening) evaluations of their teaching. Only such observation and feedback . . . provide the precision and concreteness, which make the talk about teaching useful. (pp. 12–13, emphasis in original)

Fifteen years later, Kruse, Louis and Bryk (1995) succinctly made a similar case from their research on professional learning communities. They note that five critical elements undergird effective PLCs: reflective dialogue, de-privatisation of practice, collective focus on student learning, collaboration, and shared norms and values. Then they identify two sets of necessary conditions. One set is "structural"—in particular, time to meet and talk, interdependent teaching roles and communication structures. A second needed set of conditions is referred to as "social and human resources" (what we would call "culture") and includes openness to improvement, trust and respect, skill base, supportive leadership and socialisation of new and current staff.

Earlier, Susan Rosenholtz (1989) had drawn on the importance of community in documenting the difference between "stuck" and "moving" schools, which she alternatively labelled as "learning impoverished" and "learning enriched" schools. She contrasts the two sets of schools. Stuck schools are characterised by:

> Little attachment to anything or anybody. Teachers seemed more concerned with their own identity than a sense of shared community. Teachers learned about the nature of their work randomly, not deliberately, tending to follow their individual instincts. Without shared governance, particularly in managing student conduct, the absolute number of students who claimed teachers' attention seemed greater. . . . Teachers talked of frustration, failure, tedium and managed to transfer those attributes to the students about whom they complained. (p. 208)