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Introduction

This *Study Guide* is a tool to accompany the second edition of *What Great Principals Do Differently: Eighteen Things That Matter Most* by Todd Whitaker. It is a practical resource for educational leaders who are examining what great principals do that sets them apart from others. This guide will provide assistance to instructors, staff developers, professors, or any other educational leaders who are working with principals to hone their leadership skills. In addition, principals reading and studying Whitaker's book can use this guide as a "workbook" for the original text. This companion guide will serve as a road map for helping principals focus on the leadership beliefs, behaviors, attitudes, and commitments that have a positive impact on teaching and learning in our classrooms and our schools.

The second edition of *What Great Principals Do Differently* is filled with practical, common-sense advice for principals serving at the K–12 levels. Whitaker's book focuses on what great principals do that sets them apart, clarifying best practices based on research and numerous school-based studies and visits. Ultimately, Whitaker's book is one that principals can read and *use*—and put to use immediately. This guide, therefore, is written in a way that allows the facilitator to exhort principals involved in the study not only to read and understand essential concepts, but also to take these concepts back into their schools and implement new strategies and ideas in a practical and relatively simple manner.

Each part of this book corresponds to one or two chapters of *What Great Principals Do Differently*. To help you plan and organize your study sessions, each chapter is divided into the following five sections:

- ◆ **Key Concepts:** These summaries of the key points for each chapter in the book will help you review and focus your thoughts.
- ◆ **Discussion Questions:** These questions and ideas help you learn more about yourself and your colleagues and will aid constructive conversation in the study group, workshop, or classroom setting.
- ◆ **Journal Prompts:** Based on the specific contents of each chapter, the journal prompts help you reflect, work through essential issues, and record what you have learned in writing.
- ◆ **Group Activities:** These activities allow you to explore concepts and ideas further by interacting with others in your study group, workshop, or classroom.
- ◆ **Application:** This section provides strategies for applying what you have learned in your school.

This guide was written to help facilitators lead principals through the contents of a very important and practical book. A foremost goal for facilitators is to enable principals not only to read and understand the contents of the book, but also to *use* the information learned in their own schools.

Part One

Chapter 1: Why Look at Great?

Chapter 2: It's People, Not Programs

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, 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 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 examine 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 who already work there.
- ◆ 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.

? Discussion Questions

1. What do great principals see when they view their schools and the people in them?
2. Why should we look at what great principals do?
3. In what ways is looking at ineffective principals limited in its value? On the other hand, why must we also study less effective principals and schools when determining what distinguishes those identified as great?
4. As a school principal, what guides the decisions you make each day?
5. What are some ways you can ensure that you recruit and hire the very best teachers? How can you improve the teachers already working at your school?
6. Why do certain programs work so well for some teachers while other teachers using these same programs fail?



Group Activities

It's Not What You Do—It's How You Do It

Beginning on page 6 of the text, Whitaker describes several “programs” that he deems neither a problem nor a solution: open classrooms, assertive discipline, whole language, direct instruction, mission statements, and standards-based assessment. Divide the class into several groups of four to six participants each. Ask each group to discuss the relative merits of one or more of the above “programs” or to pick another one not listed above. Participants should discuss how the chosen program can work effectively or ineffectively, sharing any specific examples from their own experience. Have each group report back whether it was the *people* involved or the *program* itself that determined the level of success.

You Don't Say ...

Distribute the six quotations regarding leadership below, one each to six groups. Allow time for all groups to study and discuss their quotation. Have them discuss how the quotation is in some way connected to the material presented in Chapter 1 and/or Chapter 2 of the text. Ask each group to offer another quotation with which they are familiar—or even create an original sentence—and share their work with the entire group.

Leadership should be more participative than directive, more enabling than performing.

A good leader inspires others with confidence in him; a great leader inspires them with confidence in themselves.

Good leaders make people feel that they're at the very heart of things, not at the periphery. Everyone feels that he or she makes a difference to the success of the organization. When that happens, people feel centered and that gives their work meaning.

Good leaders develop through a never-ending process of self-study, education, training, and experience.

A good leader is not the person who does things right, but the person who finds the right things to do.

Leaders don't force people to follow—they invite them on a journey.