



100-DAY LEADERS

Turning Short-Term Wins Into
Long-Term Success in Schools

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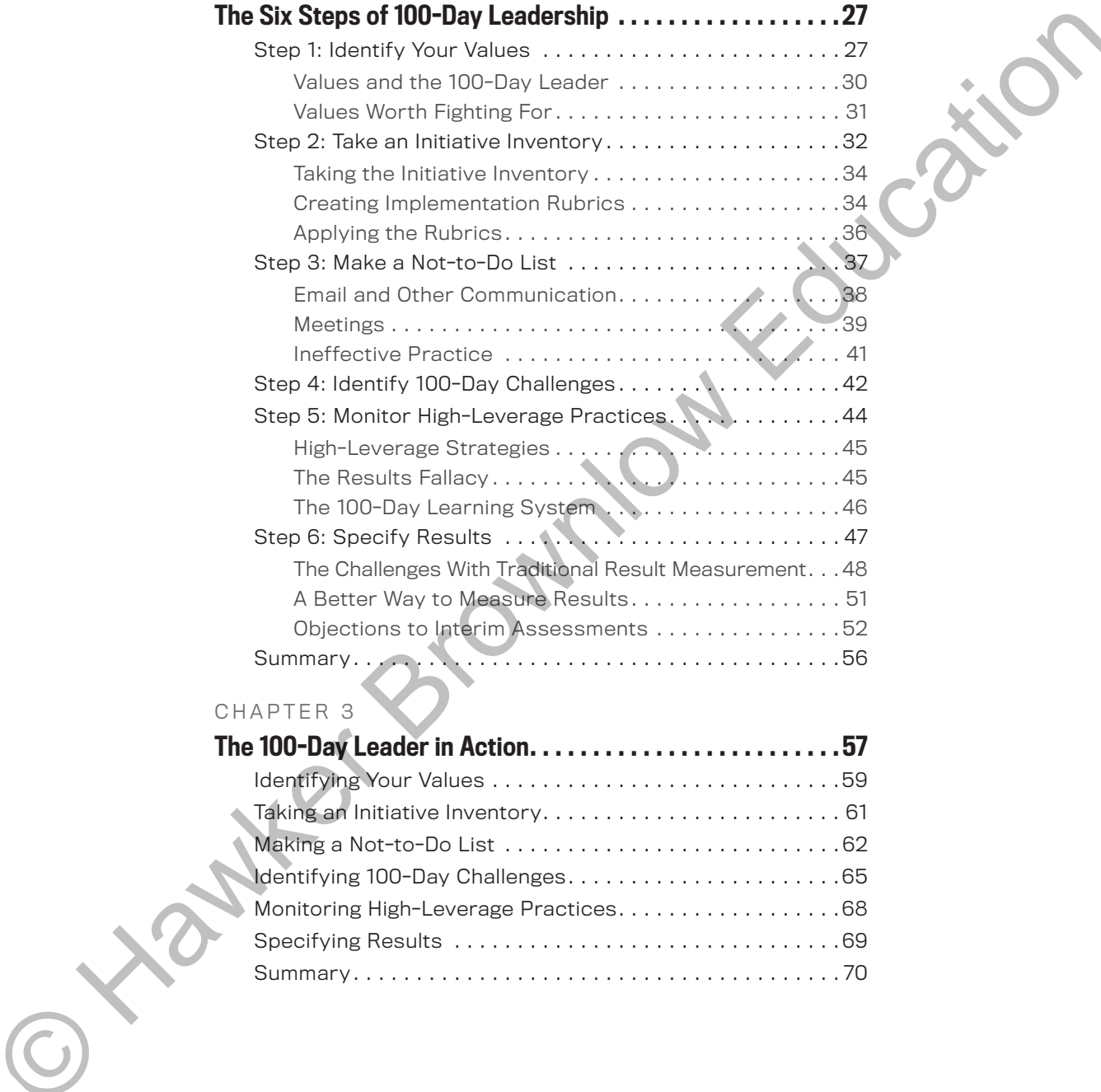
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INTRODUCTION

WHY ONE HUNDRED DAYS?

IN OUR TRAVELS around the world presenting at educational conferences and consulting with schools, we have noticed that too many educational leaders are experiencing frustration, fragmentation, and burnout. They face more demands than ever before, yet they have the same amount of time they have always had—just twenty-four hours in a day—to get the job done. Many leaders are overwhelmed with priorities, projects, and tasks and feel like they are in an endless game of whack-a-mole, attempting to hit every demand that arises, while not making progress on their most important priorities. Although leaders can't add hours to the day, they can make every hour more productive and focused. If you have felt the frustration of too many demands on your time and a horizon full of things to get done, then this book is for you.

In this book, we present a system for focusing on the highest-leverage leadership actions that will yield significant results in just one hundred days. Most importantly, this first one hundred days will set the pattern for the one hundred days after that, and for every succeeding one hundred days, as long as the leader bears responsibility for personal and organizational results. Our focus on short-term wins will energize your colleagues, students, and communities. While you will always have longer-term goals, this 100-day plan will provide the organizational focus and psychological energy that people in your school or district require to know that you are making progress. This plan allows you to steadily encourage and support the teachers and

administrators in your building or district who will get the job done. You will replace the cynicism often associated with long-term strategic planning with a laser-like focus on what matters most.

If you think that one hundred days is not long enough to produce significant change, consider these remarkable accomplishments that people have achieved within that time frame: the writing of the U.S. Constitution, the longest-surviving governing document in the world, in the 18th century (Walenta, 2010); in the 19th century, Fyodor Dostoyevsky's *The Gambler* (Hoey, 2017); and the presidential and legislative enactments that lifted the United States from the Great Depression and set the stage for saving the world from fascism in the 20th century (Alter, 2006). Great things can happen in one hundred days!

Our observations of effective school change confirm these lessons from history. In a single semester—usually about one hundred days—schools have achieved dramatically improved student performance, better climate and culture, improved faculty morale, and better discipline and attendance. Our research conducted in schools around the world and published here for the first time, demonstrates that schools can do the following, within one hundred days.

- Reduce the failure rate by more than 90 percent.
- Reduce chronic absenteeism by more than 80 percent.
- Reduce the suspension rate by more than 50 percent.
- Radically transform faculty morale.

We have witnessed these results in elementary, middle, and high schools. They occur in urban, suburban, and rural schools; in schools with high concentrations of students from low-income families and schools where the students are affluent; and in schools where large numbers of students do not speak English at home and schools where the entire student body consists of native English speakers (DuFour,

DuFour, Eaker, & Many, 2010; Reeves, 2001, 2016b). These results happen among students with a wide range of demographic characteristics. If we have learned anything in more than a century of combined leadership experience, it is that leadership makes the difference for student achievement and educational equity. Although most of our experience is in the K–12 public education field, we also have leadership experience in universities, private schools, charter schools, nonprofit organizations, and the military. Regardless of the setting, we see a consistent theme: short-term wins—gains in confidence that occur within one hundred days—establish the confidence and credibility necessary for long-term success. We acknowledge the value of longer-term goals and strategies; however, we find that those have no chance of successful implementation without the momentum that results from 100-day leadership.

Years-long strategic plans that offer more platitudes than substance make stakeholders weary. What these stakeholders—parents, students, teachers, community members, and educational policymakers—long for are results. They want short-term wins that restore confidence that the hard work teachers and students engage in will yield something more than vague promises of reform.

This book suggests a new way of thinking about leadership. Whether the project is large in scope, such as transforming a school into a professional learning community (PLC; DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, Many, & Mattos, 2016), or smaller in scope, such as developing formative assessments or new grading practices in a single semester, *100-Day Leaders* brings a sense of daily accomplishment, from the classroom to the boardroom. The approach is rigorous, clearly distinguishing between implementation that is *PLC lite* (DuFour & Reeves, 2016) and the courageous, risky, and often unpopular decisions involved in implementing effective and lasting change.

We wish to make it clear what this book is and what it is not. In this book, we offer an integrated approach in which the leader will

see connections that others in the organization may not find apparent; curriculum, assessment, facilities, transportation, food service, teacher evaluation, board relationships, and a host of other complex interactions lie at the heart of *100-Day Leaders*. Therefore, this book is not a policy manual, academic treatise, or checklist. Rather, it is a practical guide for leaders at every level—from state, provincial, and national policymakers to superintendents, principals, and department and grade-level team leaders—that will support immediate transformations in culture, practice, and performance. We provide a coaching and development model for leaders who are willing to challenge themselves and their leadership teams to rise to greater heights of effectiveness.

In the chapters that follow, we begin with the moral imperative of leadership. This is the fundamental obligation educators owe to the students they serve. Educators pursue this moral obligation through the PLC process, the central organizational system for effective educational organizations, from the classroom to the boardroom. We make a compelling case for the PLC process in which we share evidence of the impact that it has on student achievement.

Every leader aims to create personal and organizational change that results in continuous improvement, but successful and sustainable change is often elusive. Change begins not with hierarchical commands, but with effective introspection. Leaders cannot seek to change others until they gain the self-awareness to change themselves. Effective 100-day leaders must focus on a few priorities; our research suggests that focused leaders have dramatically more impact on student results than leaders who are fragmented due to initiative fatigue (Reeves, 2011b; Schmoker, 2011).

We then turn our attention to *culture*—the daily actions that represent what great organizations are all about. Culture is not about attitudes, words, or beliefs; rather, it is about specifically observable actions. Although leaders must see the big picture, they also

understand the details of implementation, team by team, task by task, kid by kid, and skill by skill.

Leaders face myriad decisions and challenges. We suggest a disciplined approach to leadership decision making in which leaders systematically compare the advantages and disadvantages of alternatives they face. Accountability systems have, since the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act in 2001, focused on student test scores (DuFour, Reeves, & DuFour, 2018). This change was prompted, on the one hand, by frustration with lagging student achievement, and, on the other, by the recognition that a focus on “accountability” was a political asset. We suggest a system in which leaders consider not only the effects of effective education but also the causes—the factors over which leaders have the greatest influence. Persistence and resilience are two of the greatest assets of 100-day leaders, and we consider the factors that can encourage—or undermine—resilience and persistence in the face of adversity. Finally, we consider how great leaders collaborate. Although leading can be lonely and isolating, the most successful 100-day leaders engage in remarkably effective collaboration.

Following is a guide to how we’ve organized this two-part book.

Part 1: Exploring 100-Day Leadership

In part 1 of this book, we consider the *why* and *how* of 100-day leadership. We begin by exploring the moral imperative of leadership and then we look at the six steps to becoming a 100-day leader.

The Moral Imperative

The moral imperative to improve student learning—*why* educators do what they do—is essential, as educators will not implement prescriptions based on policy; they must see that they operate in a moral context. Moral imperatives guide our decision making when no one is looking. There are no rewards or sanctions, only a response to the leader’s inner compass that provides the moral foundation for