Creating Excellence Through School Culture:

The Target, the Team, and the Tactics

Connie Myer

Abstract

Although specific, common characteristics have been found among high-performing schools, the predominant finding in the research literature is that there is no single, clear-cut recommended approach to attaining these characteristics. The position proffered in this paper is that: (1) a school leader can create a powerful, high-performing school by engineering a culture in which all elements are collectively focused on student success, and (2) this culture can be created by centering on three broad areas: the target, the team, and the tactics. The successful school leader must establish a shared vision and align all the elements of the school toward achieving that goal. The leader must build strong teams who work collaboratively toward the shared vision. Previous research is cited regarding the tactics that can be used to effectively implement this school improvement work. It is proposed that strong leaders whose behavior is based on an understanding of the insights presented here will have a direct, positive influence on both personal and organizational success. The case made here is the synthesis of ideas drawn from a focused review of the literature, the author's background in education leadership, and conclusions of case studies conducted on six high-performing schools in Tennessee.

Connie Myer is currently the director of the Professional Education Department at Wheeling Jesuit University. She teaches in both the undergraduate teacher-preparation program and the Master's in Education Leadership program. Her research interests are education leadership, school improvement, and aspiring principals. She has been a classroom teacher, a regional technology coordinator, an assistant principal, a principal, and a director of student services.

Education literature is replete with studies examining high-performing schools across the country and documenting the characteristics they have in common. Although specific, common characteristics have been found, the predominant finding is that there is no single, recommended approach to attaining these characteristics of high-performing schools.

The position proffered here is that: (1) a school leader can create a powerful, high-performing school by engineering a culture in which all elements are collectively focused on student success, and (2) this culture can be created by centering on three broad areas: the target, the team, and the tactics. This position is the synthesis of ideas drawn from a focused review of the literature, the author's background in education leadership, and conclusions of case studies conducted on six high-performing schools in Tennessee. The remainder of this paper presents information to justify the argument.

Tennessee High-Performing Schools (THPS) Case Studies

In 2005, the Appalachia Educational Laboratory (AEL) at Edvantia, a nonprofit education research and development corporation, funded a study conducted by Craig, Butler, Cairo, Wood, Gilchrist, Holloway, Williams, and Moats. The purpose of the study was to identify the common characteristics of high-performing schools in Tennessee, to determine if these features were consistent with what other studies of high-performing schools have reported, and to consider whether any of the identified components had any potential for being used to improve student achievement in low-performing schools.

Literature Review. The predominant finding in a review of the relevant research literature in the THPS study reveals that there is no single thing schools can do to become more successful in producing higher levels of student achievement, other than perhaps to engage in years of hard work focused on that improvement. Other findings, which were related to high

expectations, curriculum, instructional time, collaboration and hard work, effective leadership, and parent involvement, were consistent with findings in other studies.

High Expectations. Researchers found that high-performing schools typically embrace a culture of high expectations. These high expectations for students generally motivate students to perform at higher levels and support increased student achievement. It is also common that this culture of high expectations is directed at faculty and staff and includes regular students as well as students with special needs.

Curriculum. Studies of high-performing schools indicate that these schools focus on the curriculum and work to ensure that their curriculum, instruction, and assessment are aligned with applicable standards. Top-performing schools report extensive use of standards to design curriculum and instruction, assess student work, and evaluate teachers.

Instructional Time. Studies of schools in several states have found that faculty in high-performing schools maximize the amount of time spent on instruction by structuring the school day efficiently and creating additional time for instruction. This was accomplished variously by structuring the school day to minimize interruptions and transition time and by providing additional instruction time after school or during the summer. Other researchers observed that an academic, instructional focus was a common feature of the high-performing schools they studied.

Collaboration and Hard Work. The presence of talented, hard-working, effective teachers was identified by several researchers as a component of high-performing schools. Collaboration or teamwork has been reported as a key feature that hard-working teachers exhibit and is another characteristic commonly observed by researchers in high-performing schools. Also found was that a collaborative attitude tends to characterize the relationships of staff within high-performing schools as well as relationships between the school and outside entities such as

the district office and the larger community. Also emphasized was the role of collaborative or democratic decision-making processes.

Effective Leadership. Effective leadership is another important characteristic of high-performing schools. A common theme in existing research is that school leaders in successful schools tend to focus on instructional issues. Principals have been characterized as "leaders of learning," and that their direct involvement in the teaching and learning process is critical.

Parent Involvement. High-performing schools are frequently found by researchers to have high levels of parent involvement. Whereas the nature of the involvement varies from school to school, it was noted that high-performing schools tend to work to actively involve students' parents in the teaching and learning process.

Other Factors. Other characteristics and practices identified by researchers as being associated with high-performing schools include: (1) purposeful teacher hiring practices, (2) effective use of resources, and (3) differentiation or flexibility in instruction.

Research Methods. Six schools were selected for the study: two elementary, two middle, and two high schools considered to be high performing based on a set of mathematics and English/language arts performance indicators. A battery of selected surveys was conducted using Edvantia's descriptions of the components of continuously improving schools: learning culture, school/family/community connections, effective teaching, shared leadership, shared goals for learning, and purposeful student assessment. In addition, researchers conducted teacher and administrator interviews and reviewed school documents.

Findings. The researchers found that high-performing schools in Tennessee were characterized by dedicated, hard-working teachers who were implementing curricula described

as being aligned with state standards and working within school cultures of high expectations for student and teacher performance.

School leaders in these high-performing schools attempted to make teaching and learning the central focus of the schools. Teachers employed multiple assessment strategies and used data to make instructional decisions to implement differentiated teaching strategies in order to meet the learning needs of their students. All of these things occurred in an environment of strong parent interest and community support, and continuous improvement is the norm. Decades of study by various researchers and organizations support these findings as common to high-performing schools.

Recommendations. As a result of the study, researchers advised leaders of low-performing schools to: (a) emphasize high expectations for student behavior and learning; (b) emphasize high expectations for teachers; (c) work hard with dedicated effort; (d) focus on effective teaching; and (e) involve the parents. Each of these recommendations is well documented and supported in the relevant research literature. However, there was no single, definitive method for improving a school that could be recommended (Craig, J., Butler, A., Cairo, L., Wood, C., Gilchrist, C., Holloway, J. Williams, Moats, S., 2005).

The notion proposed in this paper is that the school leader can make immense strides in school improvement by focusing on the transformation of the school culture. Herein is the explanation of a proposed three-pronged approach—the target, the team, and the tactics—to shaping a school's culture that will form the foundation of a powerful, high-performing school.

Three Important Elements of Transforming a School Culture

The only thing of real importance that leaders do is to create and manage culture, according to Schein (1992). An academically effective school is distinguished by its culture: a

structure, process, and climate values and norms that channel staff and students in the direction of successful teaching and learning (Purkey & Smith, 1989). This kind of powerful school has a strong sense of collective identity and community spirit that can carry it through extraordinarily tough times (Kouzes & Posner, 2003). Creating such a school is imperative for the school leader, who can achieve it by focusing on the target, the team, and the tactics to transform the school culture.

The term *target* refers to a shared, unique vision of the ennobling possibilities for what the school could be. The term *team* refers to everyone involved with the school producing the human resource synergy that gives the group the ability to outperform even its best individual member (Buchanan & Huczynski, 1997). The term *tactics* refers to the thoughtful means by which the school leader can create a culture of success in which both students and teachers flourish. The design of a high-performing school culture begins with establishing the target.

The Target. The terms *target*, *vision*, *mission*, *objective*, and *purpose* are often used interchangeably. In any case, developing an ideal vision as a target requires thoughtful planning. The norms of a school, regardless of how they manifest themselves, underscore the point that they should represent a clear, articulated vision of what the school stands for, a vision that embodies core values and purposes (Saphier & King, 1985). You have to know where you are going and be able to state it clearly and concisely. You have to care about it passionately. That all adds up to vision. The vision is the concise statement or picture of where the school and its people are heading and why they are proud of it (Phillips, 1992).

One of the most consistent themes offered by leaders of high-performing schools is that the central principle of the vision for the school is student learning (Patterson & Kelleher, 2005). It is the school's role to improve society by producing literate, self-supporting citizens who make

a contribution to their world. This role gives a common purpose to all the elements of the school (Wilmore, 2002).

Kouzes and Posner (2003) encourage leaders to envision the future and imagine the attractive opportunities that are in store once they and their constituents arrive at the final destination. In some ways, leaders live their lives backward. They see pictures in their mind's eye of what the results will look like even before they have started their project, much as an architect draws a blueprint or an engineer builds a model. Their clear image of the future pulls them forward. Intentional, proactive planning is an important part of the process of establishing a target vision.

The purpose of the planning process is to identify, from among the myriad of things that could be done, those few strategic objectives that, when achieved, would produce previously unattainable results. The planning process is the vehicle for setting priorities. It is also the means by which new ideas, old beliefs, and current practices are put under the magnifying glass. Planning provides a strategic framework for action, but it does not end at the close of the school year. The process is dynamic and continuous. Plans may have to be modified, but if priorities are set, all can continue to stay focused on reaching the target (Kaltman, 1998).

The development of a school vision involves getting faculty, staff members, families, and committee members together to talk, discuss, collaborate, and use data-driven decision making to determine exactly where the campus is now and where it wants to be in the future. The place the school wants to be becomes the campus vision. From that point on, everything the campus does should be aligned with that vision. Develop goals and strategies to achieve it. Align resources and staff development with it. Everything said, done, planned for, or purchased should focus on the achievement of this collaboratively developed campus vision. This does not mean the vision

won't change as the school changes. It simply means that at this moment in time, this is the school's vision. As times and situations change, so will the vision. Everything grows and changes; so does the vision (Wilmore, 2002).

When a target is clearly established, decision making is easier. If an activity causes you to lose sight of your priorities and is unrelated to the target, it needs to be questioned. It is tempting to get sidetracked into pursuing easy, but unrelated, successes. The yardstick that should be used to measure performance is not a list of minor, perhaps peripheral, accomplishments, no matter how long. Even extraordinary performance on a secondary priority is only an unnecessary success and an unwelcome distraction. The real measure is the contribution you are making toward achieving your primary objective and this is where all efforts need to be concentrated (Kaltman, 1998).

There are people who do not put emphasis on a school vision or mission. They consider it to be merely "soft stuff" that people in ivory towers talk about but that has no real meaning in the actual management of a school. The problem is that if we do not know where or why we are going someplace, it should come as no surprise when we do not get there. We must "begin with the end in mind" (Covey, 2004).

Educational leaders, along with leaders in most professions, have a deserved reputation for "spewing forth a barrage of well-intentioned slogans that attempt to convey meaning but fail miserably in practice. No wonder people tune out when school leaders start chirping about mission, vision and values" (Patterson & Kelleher, 2005). Many times school leaders themselves aren't clear about what they mean. This lack of clarity inevitably creates even greater confusion in the minds of those receiving the message. Especially in times of adversity, people need leaders to provide clear direction anchored in clearly understood values. These personal values

are nested in layers to create a hierarchy that portrays what matters most to you (Patterson & Kelleher). When these personal values are embedded in the shared vision for the school, there is a heightened sense that everyone in the school is both obligated and able to take control of his or her life and can make a positive difference in the school. This is the foundation of building effective school teams.

The Team. Grand dreams do not become significant reality through the actions of a single leader. Leadership is a team effort—but creating and sustaining the team requires individual leadership. A simple test to detect whether someone is on the road to becoming a leader is the frequency of use of the word "*we"* (Kouzes & Posner, 2003).

Leadership does not exist in a vacuum but is simply one component of effective organizational behavior (Glatthorn & Jailall, 2009). No matter how capable a leader is, he or she alone won't be able to deliver a large project or program without the joint efforts and synergies that come from the team. Whereas there are several hundred definitions of leadership in the academic literature, the simplest way to know is just to look to see whether that person has followers, perhaps whether they see themselves as such or not. If you think you're a leader and you turn around and no one is following you, then you're simply out for a walk (Kouzes & Posner, 2010).

A conductor works at getting each member of the orchestra to play an instrument in concert with all the other members; success is determined by how well they play together. Good leadership enables the players, whether in the orchestra or on the basketball team, to achieve more as members of the group than they ever could as individuals. Leadership is about relationships. A leader must form relationships that build a team (Hoerr, 2005).

The principal with a moral imperative can help realize it only by developing leadership in others. It is the *combined* forces of shared leadership that make a difference. School leadership is a *collective* enterprise (Fullan, 2003). The term *team* can represent groups as broad as the multicultural citizens of the whole school district or as narrow as the social studies faculty in a high school. Every organization has subcultures (Patterson & Kelleher, 2005).

We all need to remember that success begins with building relationships. It doesn't end there, and relationships aren't the only things that matter. However, unless the relationship piece is in place, successfully completing the task will be much more difficult, whatever the task may be (Hoerr, 2005).

The role of the principal in cultivating a network of relationships is of importance not only in developing collaborative, participatory decision making but in maintaining the restructuring effort as a whole (Prestine, as cited in Murphy & Seashore, 1994). The principal of a successful school is not the instructional leader but the coordinator of teachers as instructional leaders (Glickman, 1991).

Part of the appeal of a team for its members—and a tool team builders can use—is the human need to *belong*. When the needs for safety and for physiological well-being are satisfied, the need for love, affection, and belonging can emerge. People seek to overcome feelings of loneliness and alienation. This involves both giving and receiving love, affection, and the sense of belonging (Maslow, as cited in Huitt, 2007). The need to belong is a powerful, fundamental, and extremely pervasive motivation (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Another reason team membership can be personally appealing is that one of the most powerful internal motivators on the planet is a sense of meaning and purpose (Thomas, 2009).

Facilitative principals have repeatedly expressed the value of the support network that a group of like-minded colleagues provided them. They bring teams of teachers, parents, and support staff to network retreats. They seek out each other socially and professionally. For instance, a common occurrence in such a setting is for the high-school staff to visit an elementary school in another district, where they would learn about a technique such as portfolio assessment. Elementary principals feel comfortable interacting with middle school and high school principals. Their common link is their belief that staff should be involved in and have ownership of decisions that affect their capacity to teach effectively (Murphy & Seashore, 1994).

In a school with a facilitative leader there is a heightened sense that everyone in the school is both obligated and able to take control of his or her professional life and work environment—that everyone can and must make a difference in his or her school (Murphy & Seashore, 1994). People organize together to accomplish more, not less. Behind every organizing impulse is a realization that by joining with others we can accomplish something important that we could not accomplish alone. This impulse to organize so as to accomplish more is not only true of humans but is also found in all living systems (Hesselbein & Cohen, 1999).

Every living thing seeks to create a world in which it can thrive. It does this by creating systems of relationships in which all members of the system benefit from their connections. This self-organization in the sciences is everywhere, from microbes to galaxies. Patterns of relationships form into effective systems of organization. Organization is a naturally occurring phenomenon. The world seeks organization, seeks its own effectiveness, and so do the people in their organization (Hesselbein & Cohen, 1999).

As a living system self-organizes, it develops a shared understanding of what is important, what is acceptable behavior, what actions are required, and how these actions will get done. As the system develops, new capacities emerge from working together (Hesselbein & Cohen, 1999).

Organization occurs from the inside out as people see what needs to happen, apply their experience and perceptions to the issue, find those who can help them, and use their own creativity to invent solutions. People are exercising initiative from a deeper desire to contribute, displaying the creativity that is common to all living things (Wheatley, as cited in Hesselbein & Cohen, 1999).

Leaders are continually opening new avenues for people in the organization. They are moving toward true team structures, opening to more and more participative processes, introducing new ways of thinking (Hesselbein & Cohen, 1999). Many leaders say they feared giving up control. They feared the consequences of letting go. Ultimately, however, they found their fears were groundless. They found an unimagined resource capability that emerged when there was a common vision and a common value system (Hesselbein & Cohen, 1999).

A leadership team is composed of individuals who know that, by themselves, they lack the time, energy, and expertise to make consistently wise decisions on behalf of the organization. By relying on other team members, these individuals gain from the counsel, perspective, and different skill sets of the rest of their fellow leaders. Although the leadership team does not act robotically with a single voice, it functions much like a president's cabinet, sharing insights and coming up with the best recommendations possible (Bell & Smith, 2010).

When storms strike an organization, the *collective* resilience of those inside the organization helps determine whether the organization plateaus after the storm at the (a)

dysfunctional, (b) survival, (c) recovery, or (d) growth level of functioning (Patterson & Kelleher, 2005). A team with a strong sense of collective efficacy holds a deep-rooted belief in the group's capacity to face any threat that arises with the confidence that the culture will prevail. The team leader plays a crucial role in creating a social context that enables the team to face storms, achieve successful outcomes, and emerge with increased team efficacy (Patterson & Kelleher, 2005).

Successful leaders find it necessary to identify a constituency that they are going to work with. Somebody has to be their arms and legs (Lezotte, as cited in Patterson & Kelleher, 2005). A collaborative school team should plan ways to solicit and involve multiple stakeholders from families and the entire community to become involved and invested in the progress of their schools toward the collaboratively developed vision of excellence. What others may not be able to supply in money, they may be able to supply in time, talents, expertise, or other resources. The number-one thing we need to solicit actively and positively every day is support. We need the support of the entire school community (Wilmore, 2002).

Tactics. Great organizations begin the process of finding a path to greatness by confronting the brutal facts of their current reality. When you start with an honest and diligent effort to determine the truth of your situation, the right decisions often become self-evident. It is impossible to make good decisions without infusing the entire process with an honest confrontation of the brutal facts. Leadership does not begin just with vision. It begins with getting people to confront the brutal facts and to act on the implications (Collins, 2001).

To change the culture requires that more desirable qualities replace the existing unhealthy elements. Clear personal and collective visions are crucial for this enterprise (Barth, 2002). Educators Saphier and King (1985) identified a dozen healthy cultural norms: collegiality,

experimentation, high expectations, trust and confidence, tangible support, reaching out to the knowledge bases, appreciation and recognition, caring celebration and humor, involvement in decision making, protection of what is important, traditions, and honest and open communication. These qualities dramatically affect the capacity of a school to improve and to promote learning.

It is important for symbol and ceremony to fit student perception that teachers care about their achievement and the perception of teachers that administrators place improved student performance foremost in their orientation in their jobs. If that is true, then a strong and consistent school cultural consensus will emerge (Iannaccone & Jamgochian, 1985).

The power that administrators need cannot be given to them; they must earn their power. If administrators lack power or fail to use the power that they have (which is the same as not having the power in the first place), chaos ensues. Sometimes the chaos is loud, with disagreements, destructive battles, a lack of clarity about the organization's direction, or outright rebellion. At other times, the chaos is quiet, characterized by a high degree of apathy, with each person following his own path, moving toward and arriving at a range of destinations. In either case, if the person running the school lacks power, it bodes poorly for everyone, including the students. Of course power that is used negatively bodes poorly as well. How power is used is a significant factor in a school's culture and in determining whether or not that school attracts and supports strong teachers (Hoerr, 2005).

Discussion. The key to the three components of the target, the team, and the tactics is excellent leadership. Good leaders change organizations; great leaders change people. Leaders guide the creation of the vision, deal with external parties, and inspire, but leaders also execute

the strategies that make the vision a reality, deal with the employees, and follow through to ensure that the right things are done in the right way (Hoerr, 2005).

Relationships. Researchers at the Center for Creative Leadership found that the critical success factor for the top three jobs in organizations is relationships with subordinates (Sessa & Taylor, 2000). When leaders are in tune with the emotions of others, they create resonance between leader and constituent and among constituents, much like the musicians in an orchestra create resonance when their instruments are in tune. Insensitive, tone-deaf leaders drive negative emotions and create dissonance in a group. This discord is highly destructive to the group's functioning. Only resonant leaders generate the amplification that enables groups to produce exceptional results (Kouzes & Posner, 2003).

Throughout human history people have risked life, security, and wealth for something that is greater than themselves. People want a chance to take part in something meaningful and important. There is a deep human yearning to make a difference. People want to know that there is a purpose to their existence. They want to know that their lives mean something. A significant part of the leader's job is uncovering and reflecting back the meaning that others seek (Kouzes & Posner, 2003).

Because extraordinary achievements do not result simply from the actions of the leader, it is critical that the leader builds a team of people who feel powerful and capable of taking action. When people are with this kind of leader, they feel empowered, listened to, understood, capable, important, like they mattered, challenged to do more, and other similar descriptors. The best leaders take actions that make people strong and capable. They make people feel that they can do more than they thought they could. One of the reasons people want to follow a leader is

because they know that they will be better off as a result of being in that relationship than they would be otherwise (Kouzes & Posner, 2003).

The leader acts as the group's emotional guide. The primordial task of leadership is driving the collective emotions in a positive direction and clearing the emotional smog created by toxic emotions (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2004). Those who turn good into great are motivated by a deep creative urge and an inner compulsion for sheer, unadulterated excellence for its own sake. Those who build and perpetuate mediocrity, in contrast, are motivated more by the fear of being left behind (Collins, 2001).

Highly successful leaders channel their ego needs away from themselves and into the larger goal of building a great organization. It is not that these leaders have no ego or self-interest. Indeed, they are incredibly ambitious—but their ambition is first and foremost for the institution, not themselves. Highly successful leaders are a study in duality: modest and willful, humble and fearless (Collins, 2001).

Highly successful leaders have the attitude that, "I will take responsibility for this bad decision, but we will all take responsibility for extracting the maximum learning from the tuition we have paid." When you conduct autopsies of how difficult situations were handled without blame, you go a long way toward creating a climate in which the truth is heard. If you have the right people in the organization, you should almost never need to assign blame but need only to search for understanding and learning (Collins, 2001).

Good leaders create *thinking machines*. This means hiring people who are intelligent, eager to learn, show initiative, and have common sense. The job of the leader is to help them to realize a shared sense of purpose through discussions of the objectives and the important role each of them plays in implementing the action plans that led to the objectives. The leader should

give them empowering instructions, but remember that empowered people make mistakes. The empowerment message should be reinforced by turning those mistakes into training opportunities (Kaltman, 1998).

Realistic optimists hold high expectations for the future and, at the same time, understand that achieving something less is not total failure. The organization's goals should live in the heart, soul, and mind of the people who make up the institution. When this is the case, the people find ways to work within the realities of the human condition and the realities of the organization to achieve these goals. Just as one's core values express an overall belief about what is important in life, certain professional values express one's belief about what matters most in the work environment (Patterson & Kelleher, 2005).

School leaders are energy creators. Their own personal energy directly affects the collective energy of the organization. Resilient leaders recognize this impact and, when storms strike they consciously implement strategies to protect the team members' physical energy, nurture their emotional energy, help center their mental energy, and challenge them to draw on their spiritual energy to sustain them through the storm. A team's resilience capacity represents the team's potential to make good things happen in the face of a storm (Patterson & Kelleher, 2005).

When you believe the best about your people and treat them as talented contributors, they tend to produce in kind. This is not Pollyannaish leadership. It is a strategic choice to emphasize the positive, expect the best, and reward performance more often than punishing failure (Handy, 1996).

Leaders breathe life into the hopes and dreams of others and enable them to see the exciting possibilities that the future holds. Leaders forge unity of purpose by showing

constituents how the dream is for the common good. You cannot ignite the flame of passion in others if you cannot express enthusiasm for the compelling vision of the group. You must communicate your passion through vivid language and expressive style. The leader's excitement is catching. It spreads from leader to constituents. Their belief in and commitment to the vision are the sparks that ignite the flame of inspiration (Kouzes & Posner, 2003).

Exemplary leaders enable others to act. They foster collaboration and build trust. This sense of teamwork goes far beyond a few direct reports or close confidants. In today's "virtual" organization, cooperation cannot be restricted to a small group of loyalists; it must include all those who have a stake in the vision. You have to involve, in some way, everyone who must live with the results, and you must make it possible for others to do good work (Kouzes & Posner, 2003).

Successful school leaders can actively begin to put themselves in situations in which they are learning and in which their teachers see them as learners. In schools, expert power is the strongest, and it is incumbent upon every principal to work to develop this area. For principals, power is used to influence others to increase student learning. Developing and wielding expert power has the greatest potential for bringing about the growth of faculty and staff members (Kouzes & Posner, 2003).

Leaders also know that no one does his or her best when feeling weak, incompetent, or alienated; they know that those who are expected to produce the results must feel a sense of personal power and ownership. Leaders understand that the command-and-control techniques of the Industrial Revolution no longer apply. Instead, leaders work to strengthen others to deliver on the promises they make. A leader cannot hoard power; it must be given away. When you trust

others and give them more discretion, more authority, and more information, they are much more likely to use their energies to produce extraordinary results (Kouzes & Posner, 2003).

Good leaders proudly discuss teamwork, trust, and empowerment as essential elements of their efforts. A leader's ability to enable others to act is essential. Constituents neither perform at their best nor stick around for very long if their leader makes them weak, dependent, or alienated. When you make someone feel strong and capable, as if she can do more than she ever thought possible, that person will give all and exceed the leader's expectations. When leadership is a relationship, founded on trust and confidence, people take risks, make changes, and keep organizations and movements alive (Kouzes & Posner, 2003).

Good leaders serve as facilitators and developers rather than bosses. They are involved in helping to create a common vision of the school, to model behaviors consistent with that vision, and to allocate resources and distribute information that helps the total school community move toward that vision (Conley, 1993).

Leaders speak most clearly with their actions—changes they make in decision rules (who has the authority to make what decisions), allocation of personal time (meetings accepted and canceled), and relationships (taking the time to understand the personal stories of colleagues). When staff members hear the clarion call for transformation from a leader whose personal actions have remained unchanged, their hope turns to cynicism in an instant (Reeves, 2009).

The one quality in a leader that does matter is the ability to build relationships with people at all levels of the organization and to inspire the rest of the management team to do the same. CEOs who present themselves as fellow employees rather than masters can foster positive attitudes that translate into improved [organizational] performance (Hoerr, 2005).

Communication. Most successful leaders have the ability to communicate persuasively, either through creative use of words that paint a compelling view of the future for the organization or work group, or by the certainty with which the leader introduces the mission and the strategic plans to accomplish that mission. The second potential for influence comes from a leader's ability to tune in to the needs of the followers. Those people who feel that they are truly understood may be more likely to listen to the leader's ideas and implement his or her plans (Riggio, Murphy, & Pirozzolo, 2002).

To inspire others, the leader needs to be able to state what is unique and distinctive about the organization's vision of the future. It needs to be described so that people can picture it in their own minds, and you need to be able to talk about the future, not just the present in a way that is appealing to a large number of people. Your vision may be compelling to you, but if it is not attractive to others, they will not move toward it (Kouzes & Posner, 2003).

In schools, we must communicate to everyone—parents, community members, civic clubs, churches, strangers on the street—who we are, what we are there for, where we are going, what our plans are. Then we must invite them to join us in our crusade. Everyone involved with or who has an interest in the school is a part of the school community. The difference between success and failure revolves around analyzing and solving problems to overcome any barrier to success. Families are critical stakeholders in the learning community and, therefore, valuable assets. We need everyone in the community to help us achieve our vision (Wilmore, 2002). Leaders alone do not make anything great. Leadership is a shared responsibility. The attitude should be that you need others, and they need you. You are all in this together (Kouzes & Posner, 2010).

Leading from good to great does not mean coming up with the answers and then motivating everyone to follow your messianic vision. It means having the humility to grasp the fact that you do not yet understand enough to have the answers and then to ask the questions that will lead to the best possible insights (Collins, 2001).

Leadership. A leader's facilitative behavior is demonstrated by (a) creatively overcoming resource constraints of time, funds, and information; (b) maximizing human resource synergy by building teams with diverse skills and interpersonal chemistry; (c) maintaining sufficient awareness of staff activities to provide feedback, coordination, and conflict management; (d) spanning boundaries to create intraschool and community networks that provide recognition; (e) practicing collaborative politics that emphasize one-on-one conversation rather than large meetings; and (f) through these behaviors, modeling and embodying the school's vision. Principals use these tactics to solve student learning problems, create an environment for school restructuring, and build staff instructional and leadership capabilities (Goldman, Dunlap, and Conley, 1993).

Leaders set things in motion inside the organization. These things ripple through the system: some work, some don't, but the climate for experimentation is evident. A change here elicits a response there, which calls for a new idea, which elicits yet another response. It is an intricate exchange and co-evolution, and it is nearly impossible to look back and name any one change as the cause of all the others. Organization change is a dance, not a forced march (Hesselbein & Cohen, 1999).

The dimensions of leadership practice contributing most to teachers' commitment to change were those that helped give direction, purpose, and meaning to teachers' work (Goldman, Dunlap, and Conley, 1993). From her study on school culture as a control mechanism, Blanch

(1989) found that "group sensemaking" with school values indicates that culture is a strong control mechanism. She concludes that schools should attempt to foster consensus and that principals should act as consensus builders in the early stages of culture development.

The successful school leader must establish a shared vision and align all the elements of the school toward achieving that goal. The leader must build her own and her team member's abilities to work with each other. Doing this well will have a direct impact on both personal and organizational success (Goleman, 2006).

An organization is one large ecosystem that is interrelated and interdependent. The leader is always working on himself and working to improve his emotional bank account with others. He is working on structures, systems, and processes so they are in alignment with and supportive of the shared values and vision. Leaders need enough internal security to afford the risks of thinking abundantly and being willing to share power and knowledge and recognition and to gain and profit with other people. That is a prerequisite for tapping a new synergistic source of wealth and excitement (Hesselbein & Cohen, 1999).

The Library of Congress catalog lists more than 8,000 books written in the last 20 years on aspects of leadership. The newer perspectives on the topic center on putting ego aside, or better said, delaying immediate ego needs for the sake of finding fulfillment in the accomplishments of one's followers (Bell & Smith, 2010). A belief in oneself is the only thing that gives an individual the self-confidence to step into the unknown and to persuade others to go where no one has gone before. This self-confidence, however, has to be combined with the humility to accept that one can be wrong on occasion, that others also have ideas, and that listening is as important as talking (Handy, 1996).

Great leaders build greatness through a blend of personal humility and intense professional will (Collins, 2001). Good leaders do not consider themselves as superior leaders looking down on their less-fortunate counterparts. The best leaders have a multi-level moral imperative, personal humility, and intense professional will. They see their role as systematically developing leadership in others so that sustainability can be achieved (Collins, 2001).

Rather than thinking that you, as the leader, have all the answers, you need to be able to ask great *questions*. Great questions send people on pioneering journeys in their minds. They are much more likely to discover novel ideas when you set them free to explore on their own. The answers are out there, and they will be found among your constituents as long as people feel safe in offering them (Kouzes & Posner, 2003).

Asking questions is just one way that you can communicate that you believe in other people's abilities. Giving them choices, providing them with discretion over how things are done, and fostering accountability are others. People want to feel in charge of their own lives. They want to be in control. They want to determine their own destinies. They want to know that their input matters, that their ideas are good ones, that their answers are correct, and that their decisions will be supported. It is the job of the leader to increase people's sense of self-determination, self-confidence, and personal effectiveness. It is the job of the leader to interact with others in ways that promote connection, collaboration, confidence, and competence. When you do, you will see learning, innovation, and performance soar (Kouzes & Posner, 2003).

Clarity of purpose keeps principled warriors (those who mobilize strength, courage, and willingness to fight as necessary to fulfill their mission) focused on the big picture. It helps them avoid detours and chart a consistent course, while it permits them to be flexible about strategies

and tactics. With their eyes on the prize, conviction and commitment fuel their determination to pursue victory courageously and tirelessly. They are the warriors most likely to be remembered far more for what they built than for what they destroyed (Bolman & Deal, 2006).

A vision seen *only* by a leader, however, is insufficient to create an organized movement or a significant change. A person with no constituents is not a leader, and people do not follow until they accept a vision as their own. Leaders cannot command commitment; they can only inspire it. Leaders enlist others in a common vision. To enlist people in a vision, a leader must know his constituents and be able to relate to them in ways that energize and uplift them. People must believe that their leader understands their needs and has their interests at heart. Only through an intimate knowledge of their dreams, hopes, aspirations, visions, and values are leaders able to enlist support. Leadership is a dialogue, not a monologue (Kouzes & Posner, 2003).

To build and sustain a sense of oneness, exemplary leaders are sensitive to the needs of others. They ask questions. They listen. They provide support. They develop skills. They ask for help. They align people in a common cause. They make people feel as if anything is possible. They connect people to their need to be in charge of their own lives. They enable others to be even better than they already are (Kouzes & Posner, 2003).

In an organization with decisive leaders, the atmosphere is dynamic and vibrant. People move with a spring in their step and purpose in their direction. Opportunity seeks out the organization, and the well-focused one, backed by solid vision and well-thought-out goals, almost always succeeds (Phillips, 1992).

Peters and Austin (1985) advocated "preaching the vision." Attention, symbols, and drama are the nuts and bolts of leadership. Effective visions and organizational mission

statements cannot be forced upon the masses. Rather, they must be set in motion by means of persuasion. The people must accept and implement them wholeheartedly and without reservation. When this is achieved, it is always done with enthusiasm, commitment, and pride. Moreover, truly accepted visions tend to foster innovation, risk-taking, empowerment, and delegation. If the working troops understand what is expected of them, what the organization is trying to accomplish, then it becomes possible to make important decisions on lower levels, thereby creating a climate in which results and progress continually occur (Peters & Austin, 1985).

In the physical world, climate can determine whether plants thrive or fail to grow. The climate of a school can similarly have a major influence on morale, learning, and productivity. A welcoming, safe, and supportive environment can help students believe in their potential and provide motivation for success—particularly if they feel they are respected in all their diversity, including differing types of talents and learning styles (Gorton & Alston, 2009).

Conclusion

Whereas research such as that conducted in the Tennessee case studies indicates there are specific characteristics common to high-performing schools, no single, clear-cut approach to school improvement has been identified. The position put forth in this paper is that by developing a shared target of excellence, creating a mutually beneficial team, and using research-based tactics to develop a positive culture of learning, the school leader can move the school to high-performing status. This approach produces a collective focus of all school-related elements on student success, which is the foundation of a high-performing school.

References

Barth, R. (2002). The culture builder. *Educational Leadership, 59*(8), 6-11.

Baumeister, R. & Leary, M. (1995). The need to belong: Desire for interpersonal attachments as a human motivation. *Psychological Bulletin*, 117(3), 497-529.

Bell, A. & Smith, D. (2010). *Developing leadership abilities* (2nd Ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson.

Blanch, M. (1989). *Culture as a control mechanism in school*. Ph.D. dissertation, University of Utah.

Bolman, L. & Deal, T. (2006). *The wizard and the warrior: Leading with passion and power.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Buchanan, D. & Huczynski, A. (1997). *Organizational behavior, introductory text* (3rd Ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Conley, D. (1993). *Roadmap to restructuring: Policies, practices and the emerging visions of schooling.* Eugene, OR: University of Oregon ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management.

Covey, S. (1990a). *Principle-centered leadership*. New York, NY: Simon and Schuster.

Covey, S. (2004). *The 7 habits of highly effective people: Powerful lessons in personal change.* New York, NY: Free Press, Simon and Schuster.

Craig, J., Butler, A, Cairo, L., Wood, C., Gilchrist, C., Holloway, J., Williams, S., & Moats, S. (2005, December). *A case study of six high-performing schools in Tennessee.* Retrieved from http://www.edvantia.org/products/pdf/TN_High_Performers.pdf.

Fullan, M. (2002). The change leader. *Educational Leadership, 58*(9), 6-10.

Fullan, M. (2003). *The moral imperative of school leadership*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Glatthorn, A. & Jailall, J. (2009). *The principal as curriculum leader: Shaping what is taught and tested*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Glickman, C. (1991). Pretending not to know what we know. *Educational Leadership, 12*(4), 125-128.

Goldman, P., Dunlap, D., & Conley, D. (1993). Facilitative power and non-standardized solutions to school site restructuring. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 29*, 69-92.

Goleman, D. (2006). *Emotional intelligence: Why it can be more than IQ* (10th Ed.). New York, NY: Bantam Dell.

Goleman, D., Boyatzis, R. & McKee, A. (2004). *Primal leadership: Realizing the power of emotional intelligence*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.

Gorton, R. & Alston, J. (2009). *School leadership and administration*. Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill.

Handy, C. (1996). *Beyond certainty: The changing worlds of organizations*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Business School Press.

Hesselbein, F. & Cohen, P. (Eds.). (1999). *Leader to Leader*. New York, NY: Drucker Foundation.

Hoerr, T. (2005). *The art of school leadership*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Huitt, W. (2007). Maslow's hierarchy of needs. *Educational Psychology Interactive*. Valdosta, GA: Valdosta State University. Retrieved December 2, 2011 from, http://www.edpsycinteractive.org/topics/regsys/maslow.html.

Iannaccone, L. & Jamgochian, R. (1985, May). *High performing curriculum and instructional leadership in the climate of excellence*. National Association of Secondary School Principals Bulletin, 28-35.

Kaltman, A. (1998). *Cigars, whiskey, and winning: Leadership lessons from General Ulysses S. Grant*. Paramus, NJ: Prentice Hall Press.

Kouzes, J. & Posner, B. (2003). *The leadership challenge workbook*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Murphy, J. & Seashore Louis, K. (1994). *Reshaping the principalship: Insights from transformational reform efforts*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Patterson, J. & Kelleher, P. (2005). *Resilient school leaders: Strategies for turning adversity into achievement*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Peters, T. & Austin, N. (1985). *A passion for excellence*. New York, NY: Random House.

Phillips, D. (1992). *Lincoln on leadership: Executive strategies for tough times*. New York, NY: Warner Books.

Purkey, S. & Smith, M. (1982). *Too soon to cheer? Synthesis of research on effective schools. Educational Leadership, 40*(3), 64-69.

Reeves, D. (2009). *Leading change in your school: How to conquer myths, build commitment, and get results*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Riggio, R, Murphy, S, & Pirozzolo, F. (2002). *Multiple intelligences and leadership*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

Saphier, J., & King, M. (1985). Good seeds grow in strong cultures. *Educational Leadership*, *42*(6), 67-74.

Schein, E. (1992). *Organizational culture and leadership*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Sessa, V. & Taylor, J. (2000). *Executive selection: Strategies for success*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Thomas, K. (2009). *Intrinsic motivation: What really drives employee engagement* (2nd Ed.). San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler.

Wilmore, E. (2002). *Principal leadership: Applying the new educational leadership constituent council standards*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.