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The Virtues of Leadership

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Teachers and students alike seek frameworks and norm systems that help them sort out how they fit into a school's culture. Cultural frameworks are sources of sense making and meaning that all of us need.

Schools teach their culture best when they embody purposes, values, norms, and obligations in their everyday activities. Though this principle is widely accepted in word, it is often neglected in deed. The heartbeats of leadership and schools are strengthened when word and deed are one. This happens when leadership and virtue work together. Walton's (1988, 177–78) words are helpful:

The question is not whether virtue can be taught but how it may be taught. Example, not exhortation, and practice, not principle, take priority: carpenters become carpenters by building houses; pianists become pianists by playing the piano; managers become leaders by leading. The same is true of character: people become virtuous by practicing virtue and by living with moral mentors. If, for any reason, an organization becomes sidetracked, only managers of sound character can restore a sense of direction. Disciplined organizations reflect disciplined leaders whose honed abilities lead them to behave consistently, almost instinctively, in moral ways.

These leaders know and focus on what is important, care deeply about their work, learn from their successes and failures, take calculated risks, and are trustworthy people.

This article examines four leadership virtues: hope, trust, piety, and civility. When these four are at the core of leadership practice, the leverage needed for improving even the most challenging schools can be discovered.

The Virtue of Hope

Perhaps the most important, yet most neglected leadership virtue is hope. Hope often is slighted because management theories tell us to look at the evidence, be tough as nails, be objective, and blindly face reality. But, facing reality rather than relying on hope is to accept reality. Relying on hope rather than facing reality is to change reality—hopefully. Leaders can be both hopeful and realistic as long as the possibilities for change remain open. Being realistic differs from facing reality in important ways. Being realistic is to calculate the odds with an optimistic eye—to be aware of the consequences of being fateful without being preordained to the inevitability of a situation or circumstance.

Why should leaders be hopeful? Because the evidence suggests that hope can change events for the better. It is widely accepted that sick people who are hopeful members of support groups which provide encouragement, prayer, or other forms of targeted social capital get healthier and stay healthier more often than sick people without the benefit of hopeful social capital. In her review of the literature on hope and health, Roset (1999, 7) found compelling evidence to link the two: “Findings in the health sciences show a positive relationship between biochemical reactions, attributed to hopefulness, and its effect upon illness.” Oncologist Carl Simonton (in Carter 1996, 1) found that when cancer patients respond to their challenges with “feelings of hope and anticipation, the organism translates into biological processes that begin to restore balance and to revitalize the immune system.” Medical researchers (Roset 1999) found that a sense of hopefulness, from an increased sense of control, is connected with biological changes that enhance physical and mental health.

Leadership as moral action is a struggle to do the right thing according to a sense of values and what it means to be a human being.

Hope and Wishing

Hope often is confused with wishing. Hope, however, is grounded in reality, not wishful thinking. It is—to use Menninger, Mayman, and Pruyser’s (1963) term—realistic hope. They (1963, 385–86) argued:

Realistic hope . . . is based on the attempt to understand the concrete conditions of reality, to see one’s own role in it realistically, and to engage in such efforts of thoughtful action as might be expected to bring about the hoped-for change. The affect of hope, in this case, has an activating effect. It helps mobilize the energies needed for activity. By activity I mean not only motor activity but also the activity of thought or of relating oneself to another person.

The activating effect of hope makes the difference (Table 1). Wishful leaders are just that—wishful. They take no deliberate action to make their wishes come true. Hopeful leaders, on the other hand, react actively to what they hope for and deliberately strive to turn hopefulness into reality.

Table 1: Wishful vs. Hopeful Leaders

Wishful Leaders	Hopeful Leaders
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Passive reaction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Active reaction
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I wish that these kids would behave.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I hope that these kids will behave. What can I do to help?”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No faith to back up assumptions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faith in assumptions and ideas
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No pathways 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pathways
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No action 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Action
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No change takes place 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Change takes place

Faith

Hope and faith go together. Faith comes from commitment to a cause, from strong beliefs in a set of ideas, and from other convictions. Hope is so closely linked to faith that the two tend to blend into one. According to the Bible (Hebrews 11:1), “Faith is the substance of things hoped for.” This is true of faith in God, and is true of all other faith. According to Smedes (1998, 21), “No matter what we put our faith in, when faith goes, hope goes with it. In some ways, hope is faith—faith with our eyes on possibilities for the future.”

So, how does hope help schools become more effective? Faith often is communicated as a set of true assumptions. We can hope that once these assumptions are announced, they will come alive, be accepted, and stir others to action. We might have faith, for example, that:

- all children can learn given the right conditions;
- students can take responsibility for their own learning if we get the student-teacher role and other important roles set properly;
- schools can be transformed into caring learning communities;
- teachers want to be self-managing and, under the right conditions, take responsibility for their own learning;
- given the opportunity and training, even the poorest parents can be effective partners in their children’s education;
- if we provide enough support to students, all will succeed; and
- every teacher can be a leader if the circumstances are right and the issues are important to them.

These assumptions suggest pathways that bring faith and action together. We can hope, for example, that students will succeed, but we need to provide the necessary support if we want to avoid wishful thinking.

Leaders have an important responsibility. If their hopefulness is based on faith in a set of assumptions and, if these assumptions become shared by others in their school community, then a powerful force of ideas will be created. These ideas provide the basis for a school becoming a community of hope and can fuel the school's efforts to turn hope into reality. Developing a community of hope elevates the work of leadership to a level of moral action. Leadership as moral action is a struggle to do the right thing according to a sense of values and what it means to be a human being. Leaders need to be concerned with what is good as well as what is effective. We find faith in what is good, and this faith becomes the basis for hopefulness.

From Hope to Action

Action is the key differentiator in hopeful leaders and wishful leaders. Hope is based on articles of faith that function as assumptions. These assumptions provide the impetus for doing things that will change hopes into realities. Hope is a valuable asset for children, adolescents, and adults (Snyder et al. 1991). McDermott et al. (2002, 274–75) described hope as “a cognitive set comprised of goals, pathways, and agency. Individuals with high hope possess goals, find pathways to these goals, navigate around obstacles, and develop agency to reach their goals.”

Deliberately realizing hopes requires that they be transformed into goals—goals that develop into practical pathways. Having the will and determination to travel these pathways—no matter the obstacles encountered—is the windup key. Unless this key is turned, there will be no action, and what first appears as hope ends up being wishful thinking.

Turning hope into reality is a deliberate process that requires answering the following questions:

- *What are our goals?* Goals are what we hope for.
- *What are our pathways?* Pathways are the routes we take to realize our hopes.
- *What are the obstacles?* Obstacles are barriers that we must overcome.
- *How committed are we to agency—to actually doing something to realize our hopes?* Agency is determined and persistent efforts to travel the pathways.
- *Is efficacy present in sufficient strength?* Efficacy gauges the extent to which we believe that we can make a difference and that our efforts will be successful.
- *If efficacy is low, how can it be strengthened?*

The question of efficacy is critical. Do we believe that we can learn what we must and use what we learn to successfully realize our hopes? Hopeful leaders recognize potentials in persons and situations. They believe (Selznick 2002, 70) that “what people can achieve, or aspire to, is just as surely part of human nature, just as surely summoned by the human condition, as are more negative traits and dimensions.”

Wishful thinking is avoided by taking deliberate action and providing the context for both organizational and individual efficacy. There is, in a sense, a psychological magic that helps us move from hope to action. There also are deliberate pathways that can be traveled to make this transformation.

Roles, Role Relationships, and Role Sets

Faith provides the pathways and sources of leadership authority. When hope, faith, and action are joined, a covenant of obligations emerges, raising the stakes from management commitments to moral commitments. When a moral threshold is reached, administrators, teachers, parents, and students accept their roles and the elements that define them. Roles come with expectations that serve as a compass pointing the way and a beacon lighting the way. Role expectations not only are received, but also are sent. Expectations that are sent typically deal with rights; received expectations typically deal with obligations.

The role of student, for example, includes obligations such as to do one's best, turn in work on time, help other students, and be respectful. A student also has certain rights, such as qualified, competent, and caring teachers; instruction that is responsive; a safe environment; respectful treatment; and a voice in learning.

The collective commitments or promises that students, teachers, administrators, and parents make are critical. These promises outline the obligations of each role, if visions are to be realized. Students' collective commitments to a school vision can be written for them or by them. Some administrators and teachers may wonder whether they want to invite students to outline the collective commitments required to help the school achieve its vision. Because the commitments of students and teachers are reciprocal, students are tied to those commitments made by their teachers. Thus, these role relationships contain rights and obligations that define the ties linking the roles of teachers and students.

Similarly, teachers have roles that include rights and responsibilities. Sociologists Hage and Powers (1992, 7) viewed a role as "a package of broadly recognized rights and obligations that define what would be expected of anyone occupying a given position embedded within a system of social relations." Rights and responsibilities are the heart of any role; therefore, roles cannot meaningfully exist without being linked to other roles. The rights and responsibilities of teachers, for example, are understood within the context of rights and responsibilities of students, principals, and parents.

Hage and Powers (1992, 7) explained, "A role relationship refers to those rights and obligations commonly taken to define the nature of the tie that links two roles together." Bundles of role relationships result in role sets. If these role sets evolve into friendly networks, then even the most difficult schools will have the moral network for success. Networks are friendly when role sets are linked to common purposes and shared frameworks for working together. This linkage can transform networks of teachers and students into learning and practice communities.

When transformed, work roles are joined into a shared practice which introduces moral ties that unite people and bind them to purposes and obligations. Work roles are patterns of activities and behaviors that emerge from the social context of roles, role relationships, and sets (Table 2). As the social context for schools changes from simple to complex, patterns of activities and behaviors change in fundamental ways. Learning

becomes even more important, as does working together and leadership distributed across all roles. In today's learning organization (Hage and Powers 1992, 11), work roles are defined "in terms of information gathering, problem solving, the production of creative ideas, and the ability to respond flexibly to new situations or adjust flexibly when interacting with others."

Table 2: Key Terms

Term	Definition
Role	A package of broadly defined rights and obligations
Role relationships	Rights and responsibilities that link roles together
Role sets	Bundles of role relationships that, when linked to common purposes, evolve into friendly networks or communities of practice
Work roles	Patterns of activity and behavior that define how work will be done

Leading and learning together are important because today's roles make challenging demands on everyone. Typically, more mental activity, more information, and more problem solving are required. More learning is required by everyone. Roles, suggested Hage and Powers (1992, 13), are "defined by goals for which no certain procedure can be specified, consequently involving a relatively wide range of nonroutine tasks." It is difficult, therefore, to chart when a particular role activity might be appropriate. Teachers and principals must determine how work will be done and time will be spent while actually doing their jobs, in effect creating their practice in use.

Relational Trust

In role sets, no single person has the power to make things work. Members of an effective role set are interdependent and held together by relational trust. Trust is the tie that binds roles together and allows for the creation of role sets that embody reciprocal obligations.

Social capital and community are close cousins of relational trust. They are so close that it is doubtful that a school has only one of the cousins. Social capital is the support that students and teachers need to be more effective learners and doers. Relational trust refers to the quality and kind of social exchanges found in sets of role relationships. Trust is high when every party to the role set feels supported and safe. Support and safety are provided by social exchanges. Social capital and relational trust are the DNA

of community. They are so integral to community life that operational definitions of community routinely include them.

Leadership is about helping people understand the problems they face, helping them manage these problems, and even helping them learn to live with them.

Bryk and Schneider (2002, 20), who coined the term for use in education, described relational trust as “the social exchanges of schooling as organized around a distinct set of role relationships: teachers with students, teachers with other teachers, teachers with parents, and with their school principal. Each party in a role relationship maintains an understanding of his or her role obligations and holds some expectations about the role obligations of the others.” Relational trust, according to Bryk and Schneider (2002, 20) is “a complex web of social exchanges [that]

conditions the basic operations of schools. Embedded in the daily social routines of schools is an interrelated set of mutual dependencies among all key actors: students, teachers, principals and administrators, and parents. These structural dependencies create feelings of vulnerability for the individuals involved.”

Relational trust is the antidote to the vulnerability that is likely to be experienced by members of role sets in schools. Regardless of how deep and thorough exchanges are among people in role sets, without trusting relationships, these exchanges likely would encourage self-protection and holding back, severely limiting the capacity for collaboration, learning, and improved performance. Without trusting relationships, reciprocal bonds of obligation found in role sets would be broken, hampering chances for schools to succeed.

Trust deficits have serious consequences for schools that seem to worsen over time, such as:

- The less trust there is in a school, the more people keep things to themselves. The more people keep to themselves, the less trust there is.
- The less trust there is in a school, the more often ideas are hoarded. The more often ideas are hoarded, the less trust there is.
- The less trust there is in a school, the less likely people are to be helpful and open. The less likely that people are helpful and open, the less trust there is.

Bryk and Schneider (2003) found that relational trust was an important characteristic of the schools which demonstrated student learning improvements. They measured relational trust in terms of teacher attitudes toward other teachers, principals, and parents. They found (2003, 43) on average that improving schools showed an 8 percent increase in reading learning and a 20 percent increase in math learning over five years.

In the elementary schools studied, they (2003, 122–23) found:

- Collective decision making with broad teacher buy in occurs more readily in schools with strong relational trust.
- When relational trust is strong, reform initiatives are more likely to be deeply engaged by school participants and to diffuse broadly across the organization.
- Relational trust foments a moral imperative to take on the hard work of school improvement.

Relational trust was an important catalyst for developing a supportive work culture characterized by school commitment and a positive orientation toward change. It also was an important catalyst for developing a facilitative work structure that included developing a professional community for making decisions together and supporting teacher learning.

Trust First

Schools and school districts that succeed in bringing about change use a trust-first approach. Conversely, in schools and school districts that are less effective in bringing about change, trust is an afterthought—often preceded by vision, strategy, and action. Trust gets attention after the school or school district gets into trouble. Leaders typically wind up imposing visions and strategies,

which require increased performance monitoring. Resistance usually results, leaving leaders trying to mend fences, improve relationships, and get more people on board.

Hurst (1984), former Executive Vice President of Russelsteel, Inc. in Canada, explained that building trust first and then moving to vision, strategy, and action changed how decisions were made in his organization. A trust-first approach emphasizes open communications focused on who we are and what we believe. Hurst (1984, 82) explained,

Trust is the tie that binds roles together and allows for the creation of role sets that embody reciprocal obligations.

In our previous existence, the decisions we made were always backed up by hard information; management was decisive, and that was good. Unfortunately, too few of these ‘good’ decisions ever got implemented. The simple process of making the decision the way we did often set up resistance down the line. As the decision was handed down to consecutive organizational levels, it lost impetus until eventually it was unclear whether the decision was right in the first place. Now we worry a good deal less about making decisions; they arise as fairly obvious conclusions drawn from a mass of shared assumptions. It’s the assumptions that we spend our time working on.

A trust-first approach to strategy development and implementation doesn’t mean getting everyone on board before implementation. There is a “tipping point” that must be respected, and support must be cultivated to trigger it. In many cases, reaching this tipping point does not require a huge majority in favor of the change. In all cases,

however, the secret to change is to make sure that everyone has the support and capacity needed to implement the change successfully. Once a person is successful, and with trust in place, he or she is likely to accept the change and even to like it. As Fullan (1991, 91) stated, "In many cases, changes in behavior precede rather than follow changes in belief." Trust plays an important role in this process. Everyone is vulnerable when trying something new and needs to be assured that mistakes will be accepted and that support will be there.

Bryk and Schneider (2003) found that principals played key roles in developing trust. They (2003, 43) suggested, "Principals establish both respect and personal regard when they acknowledge the vulnerabilities of others, actively listen to their concerns, and eschew arbitrary actions. Effective principals couple these behaviors with a compelling school vision and behavior that clearly seeks to advance the vision. This consistency between words and actions affirms their personal integrity. Then, if the principal competently manages basic day-to-day school affairs, an overall ethos conducive to the formation of trust will emerge." By paying attention to personal integrity and other dimensions of trust, linking this trust to purposes, providing competent management support, and emphasizing capacity building, conditions for change are created and people feel more willing to give change a try.

Piety is a leadership virtue that requires or encourages people to look inward to their own narrow community affiliations.

The Virtues of Piety and Civility

Piety embodies showing loyalty, respect, and affection such as is usually found among friends, comrades in arms, close colleagues at work, and other groups where caring and obligations characterize connections among people. Civility draws us outward to embrace differences.

Piety is a leadership virtue that requires or encourages people to look inward to their own narrow community affiliations. This look inward is usually at the expense of looking outward to more rational and impersonal organizations or groups. As a result, leaders in schools can become blinded to other views. This blindness encourages isolation and exclusiveness that seriously limit the ability to learn from others, to be exposed to new ideas, to make new friends, and to meet new colleagues. Though piety is an important ingredient in building school communities, it also is an ingredient in gangs and cliques that develop special bonds. When held together by piety alone, these school groups become isolated from one another.

As Selznick (2002, 68) explained, "Some forms of piety ask too much of us, and for the wrong objects, or claim immunity from criticism or demand undivided and unconditional loyalty. Therefore, piety is tempered by the more dispassionate virtue of civility. Piety demands conformity and justifies exclusion, while civility welcomes diversity,

encourages tolerance, and legitimates controversy. Civility builds frameworks within which people can cooperate despite their divergent views and interests.”

Bonding and Bridging Community

The virtues of piety and civility are at the heart of building learning communities that bond people together while creating bridges that connect them to other people and views (e.g., Putnam 2000). Effective school communities depend upon the virtue of piety to provide a floor of shared values and ideas that tie everyone together, provide security and support, and give the school a special identity that communicates its character and purposes. At the same time, bridges need to be built among different groups within and outside the school. Bridging honors diversity and provides opportunities for learning as groups are exposed to new ideas. Putnam (2000) likened bonding to a sociological superglue and bridging to a sociological WD40. But balance does not just happen. Schools and their leaders have to work at cultivating balanced unity so that it becomes a central value within a school’s culture.

In schools, cultural universals include the values, standards, and norms that are meant to be shared by everyone.

When bonding and bridging are balanced, piety and civility become powerful leadership virtues. A school, for example, might bond around shared values and ideas such as nurturing a caring environment, providing rigorous academic learning, believing in the importance of effort, and developing faculty relationships that encourage the sacrificing of one’s self-interest for the common good. At the same time, the school might bridge along other dimensions, such as honoring cultural diversity and providing developmentally different safety nets for students who are falling behind—safety nets that respond to different student needs and learning styles in various ways.

One Out of Many

Selznick (2002, 72) offered *E pluribus unum* (one out of many) as a metaphor for bringing together the virtues of piety and civility. “We say yes to plurality even as we uncover convergent truths. A rich variety of beliefs and forms . . . should be accepted and supported.” On the unum side, Selznick noted (2002, 72), “Human differences are appreciated most keenly, and welcomed most sincerely, when they testify to an underlying unity. Our common humanity generates diverse ways of life. . . . That same humanity produces cultural universals.” In schools, cultural universals include the values, standards, and norms that are meant to be shared by everyone. These cultural universals are accompanied by other values, standards, and norms that are meant to be shared by some but not all. The two sets of values, standards, and norms together create a layered system of loyalty and commitments—a floor of common understandings that support differences. For example, while all students are expected to dress modestly, they need not

all dress the same. Though students may elect to take a number of courses beyond the common core, all courses must meet the same standards of rigor, student involvement, and usefulness. Teachers are expected to work together in professional development that is tied to grade, team, and departmental purposes, but they may choose different topics and venues for learning that suit their own needs and interests.

Learning can be viewed as a private good that serves individual interests but has little to do with pursuing school goals.

Leadership and Learning

Virtues strengthen the heartbeat of schools. A strong heartbeat is a school's best defense against the obstacles leaders face as they work

to change schools for the better. Strengthening the heartbeat of schools requires that we rethink what is leadership, how leadership works, what is leadership's relationship to learning, and why we need to practice leadership and learning together.

When leaders strengthen the heartbeat, their schools become stronger and more resilient. These qualities help leaders to share the burdens of leadership with others, to create collaborative cultures, and to be continuous learners. Leadership inevitably involves change, and change inevitably involves learning. Both are easier to do if we better understand the mindscapes we bring to our practice, examine them in light of what we want to do, and change them. Change begins with us—with our heart, head, and hands that drive our leadership practice.

Conventional wisdom tells us that leadership is about finding solutions to problems that people face. In reality, leadership is more about helping people understand the problems they face, helping them manage these problems, and even helping them learn to live with them. Even in the best of circumstances, leadership is difficult. Community building is a good example. Few leaders find their efforts at community building to be models of perfect harmony. Important differences exist among members of any faculty that is alive and well. Wise leaders know, however, that schools need centers of harmony that contain enough of what is important and shared to hold things together. At the same time, they encourage differences in how the center of ideas is embodied in practice. Community for them is a mosaic (e.g., Etzioni 1996/1997) comprised of many different elements held together by a common frame and glue. Creating centers of harmony is the work of a bonding community. Linking differences and learning is the work of a bridging community.

Few leaders have the competence, time, and information needed at any given time to get the job done. Wise leaders try to rely on others and build upon their leadership capacity. Leaders have funds of knowledge and skills that need constant replenishment. An important part of a leader's job is to cultivate and amass the intellectual capital needed

for the school's organizational IQ to increase. Smart leaders undoubtedly help, but smart schools make the difference over time. That is why leadership and learning together are so important. There can be leadership and there can be learning. There can be a focus on individuals and the school. Learning can be viewed as a private good that serves individual interests but has little to do with pursuing school goals. And, learning (Elmore 2002) can be viewed as something individuals feel compelled to do because it is a public good that helps schools achieve their goals. In every case, effects multiply when these dimensions are brought together. Hope, trust, piety, civility, and other leadership virtues can help.

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