

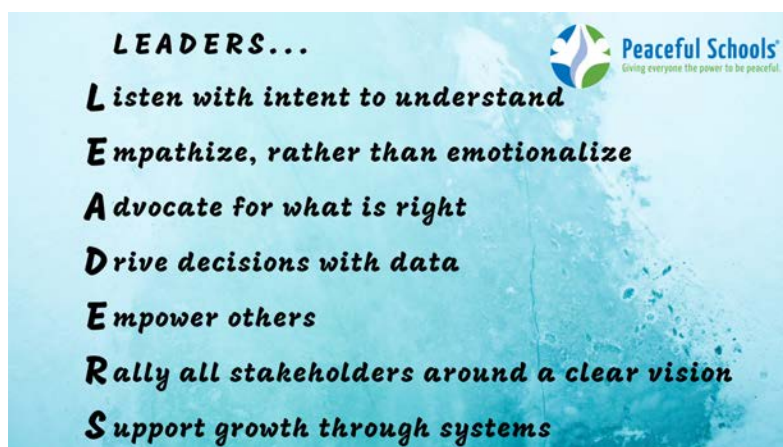
Peaceful Schools, Peaceful Leaders  
By Carin L. Reeve

Do the words “peaceful” and “leader” seem mismatched to you?

For many of us in leadership roles, there is very little about our jobs that feels “peaceful” - except maybe a few stolen minutes on the weekend. Even when we are committed to our work for all of the right reasons, many of us would still shy away from considering it peaceful. We spend 50, 60, 70, or more hours in our leadership work every week - isn't it time that we built purposefully peaceful habits into our lives as leaders?

### What does it mean to be a Peaceful Leader?

When you think about a peaceful school leader, do you envision sitting on cushions instead of at your desk with new age music playing in the background? Bringing more peaceful practice into your leadership can start with some basic building blocks that grow into sustainable systems. Let's reflect on some of the competencies of Peaceful Leaders.



### LEADERS Competencies

We use an acronym to think about these peaceful practices because, let's face it, our brains have enough going on! If we learn to identify the competencies, we can strengthen our practice and bring more peace to our leadership.

***Listen with intent to understand*** Listening with intent to understand can be a tough place to start. Leaders are in charge, and often have the final word, so we can easily forget that our voice is not the only voice that needs to be heard. Practicing this competency brings more peace to our leadership because it increases trust and respect while reducing the potential for conflict.

When we listen with intent to understand, we put others first and try to see things through their lens. This compassionate approach to listening engages both our hearts and minds.

***Empathize, rather than emotionalize*** Empathy is connecting with someone on a thinking, feeling, and experiential level. As leaders, our work is personal and our frustration level can be high, which can lead to emotionalized responses. Taking the connection out of our relationships is not the answer, rather, we must build those relationships and lead with empathy.

Empathizing is about meeting people where they are and helping them to move closer to the vision - it's not about just giving in or giving up. When we add empathy to our leadership competencies, we significantly increase our capacity to bring about change to our organization and peace to our leadership.

**Advocate for what is right** It takes real courage to be a leader; to stand up for what is right, even when it may not be what is popular. Advocating for equity, speaking up for culturally relevant discourse and practices, and always ensuring that the same quality of education we would want for our own children is the education we provide to others' children is the responsibility of leadership. It is this level of advocacy and commitment to change that often separates leaders from managers.

Advocating for what is right may seem like encouraging conflict, rather than peace, however, leaders inspire change in the hearts and minds of others. Inspiration does not grow from complacency.

**Drive decisions with data** Using data to inform decisions is a different ballgame than using your intuition. There is still a place for intuition in effective leadership practices, however, informing decisions with accurate data tells a different story. Leaders must be accountable for the story that the data tells and facilitate common goals for moving forward.

It's important to look at both growth and proficiency with data-informed practices. Celebrating the growth is almost more important than acknowledging proficiency.

**Empower others** Being a leader is not about doing all of the work yourself, in fact, it is the opposite! Being a leader is about building the capacity in others so they can rise above even our own leadership. Effectively empowering others requires that leaders have a clear vision that allows for others to grow and expand that vision; essentially adding their own seasoning to the initial dish. Leaders who insist on doing everything themselves miss out on the opportunities to try new flavors and experience new ideas. Leaders who empower others develop wonderful flavors and amazing new experiences.

Sometimes leaders will say, "It's just easier to do it myself." While it may be easier in the short term, it can create jealousy, hurt feelings, shut down, or even the loss of quality employees. Take the time to practice being clear about your expectations, get feedback about the process, and acknowledge the growth and learning in your team. Peaceful leaders connect with the big picture and invest in that future.

**Rally all stakeholders around a clear vision** Having a clear vision that is visible and connected throughout the organization is the sign of strong and effective leadership. When that vision lives and breathes in the day to day discussions of staff members, the organization is healthy and aligned to its vision. Effective leaders facilitate, rather than dictate, this vision and build excitement and support from all stakeholders.

The vision is the theme of your organization's story - the leader brings that theme to life and helps everyone see how they fit into that story - and that connected purpose is the foundation upon which peaceful leaders build everything else.

**Support growth through systems** Everything in the organization is a part of a system, but effective leaders look to build and sustain healthy, functional systems. Systems grow out of the clear vision foundation that you have built. Peaceful leaders will think through the potential for mis-communication or missteps when they are building systems. This allows for immediate course corrections when necessary and keeps the vision clear.

Systems will exist, whether or not the leader has structured them. Just like community, they will form with or without you. Purposefully building systems that support communication, peaceful problem-solving, and divergent thinking are the signs of an effective and peaceful leader.

## Closing

Leaders do have the power to be peaceful, even though there are days that may not seem like it! When we stop and think about the LEADERS competencies, we can find that space to listen, to empathize, to advocate, to use data, to empower others, to rally around a clear vision, and to build strong systems. Being strategic in developing these competencies can make the work more peaceful, purposeful, and passionate for you as a leader.

## About me

Carin L. Reeve is the Director of School Improvement at Peaceful Schools, a registered MWBE organization in Syracuse, NY. Carin has spent 27 years as a classroom leader, as a professional development leader, and as a school building leader, including four years as a successful turnaround principal. Her passions for systems thinking, organizational and leadership development, and Social and Emotional Learning have all converged at Peaceful Schools, where she supports schools and districts with developing and implementing systems of continuous improvement. Ms. Reeve's writing has been published at elephantjournal.com, ASCD Express, and Vanguard Magazine, and she has plans for a book, a TEDtalk, and to travel in order to be of benefit to others and give everyone the power to be peaceful.