

The Listening Leader: Creating the Conditions for Equitable School Transformation

By Shane Safir (Jossey-Bass, 2017)

S.O.S. (A Summary of the Summary)

The main ideas of the book:

~While principals may have many of the skills needed to be an instructional leader—creating curricula, observing teachers, running professional learning—they may lack a road map for working with adults. This book provides that road map.

~ This book shows how leaders can use *listening*—as both a skill and a mindset—as a powerful tool to transform their schools.

Why I chose this book:

So, why a whole book on listening? It's really a book about developing a mindset toward leadership that acknowledges the human side of the job. It's also a book about actively using a carefully spelled-out set of listening skills to build the kinds of humane schools where students, parents, and staff feel they belong—a necessary condition for true school transformation.

If you feel like you're rushing through the halls and would like some tools to slow down, invest in relationships, and develop a more trusting culture in which people are willing to invest in improvement, this is your book.

The Scoop (In this summary you will learn...)

- ✓ How listening can address some of the most persistent challenges we've faced in schools
- ✓ An understanding of how the brain influences behavior so you can work more productively with staff
- ✓ The three steps you can take to prepare for mindful listening when you have a difficult conversation coming up
- ✓ The three skills needed for Deep Listening—the kind of supportive listening when you turn off your “fix it” mentality
- ✓ The three skills needed for Strategic Listening—the kind of listening when you *do* have an agenda and want to influence someone's behavior or thinking, such as in supervisory and coaching meetings
- ✓ Tips and structures you can put into place to do a better job of listening to parents and students
- ✓ A set of routines and tools you can use to develop a listening culture and bring about larger school change
- ✓ The Main Idea's professional learning suggestions to implement the ideas in this book—at the end!

Introduction

When Shane Safir became principal, she already knew how to design curricula, plan professional learning, observe teachers, and many of the other skills we associate with school leadership. However, what she lacked was the ability to work effectively with *adults*. She was shocked by how easily people got provoked by one another, how difficult it was to build trust, and how challenging it was to engage people in hard conversations. Overall, she felt unprepared for the social-emotional aspects of the job. What she realized, was that the key to building relationship capital—interpersonal currency that sets the stage for school change—was the ability to *listen*. To truly transform our schools, leaders must learn to listen. The skill of listening is often overlooked. When Safir wanted to start her own school her team spent a lot of time in the community conducting one-on-one meetings with families and abiding by the **90/10** principle—that 90% of each meeting would comprise listening and just 10% would include talking. That listening eventually paid off as her school, the June Jordan School for Equity (JJSE), ended up successfully serving working class Latino and African-American students. Fourteen years after being founded, the school posted impressive results: while 35% of Latino graduates of the San Francisco Unified School District were eligible for a 4-year university, 60% of JJSE’s Latino graduates were, and 27% of African-American graduates in SFUSD were eligible compared to 75% of JJSE’s African American students.

This book helps to develop Listening Leaders—leaders who use their ears and eyes to understand people’s points of view. They initiate more questions than answers and demonstrate true curiosity for those with whom they interact. Beyond the *skill* of listening, being a Listening Leader is a *mindset* in which the leader values collegiality, professional growth, and equity. Safir’s definition of equity means providing each student with what she or he needs to learn and thrive, even if that means redistributing resources. This book is intended for school administrators, teacher leaders, coaches, and central-office leaders. The chapters contain true stories, practical tools, and questions you can use to examine your own practice. You can read it on your own—reflect, annotate the book, and self-assess your competencies using the rubric in Appendix A—or you can read it as part of a study group with other leaders.

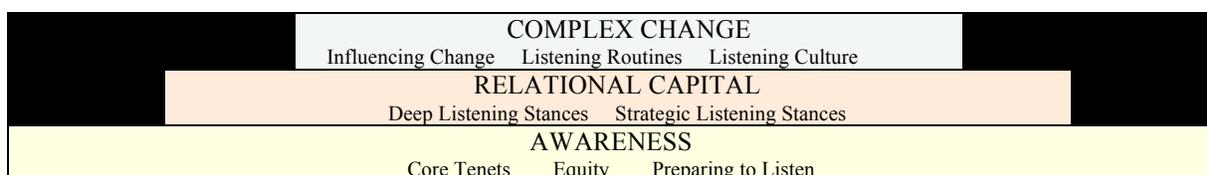
Chapter 1 – THE POWER OF TRANSFORMATIVE LISTENING

The emphasis on testing and sanctions in education has made it more difficult for leaders to truly listen to parents, students, and staff. Studies show that principals feel the job is just too complex and are stressed as a result. Because of the need to become more results-driven, principals have often sacrificed relationship- and culture-building. This book proposes an alternative in the form of the Listening Leader. The Listening Leader still cares about getting things accomplished, but she is committed to doing so in an equitable manner that puts people first. Becoming a Listening Leader involves slowing down and listening to all voices in the school community, including those that have been historically marginalized. This type of leader believes that communities can solve their own problems, the best solutions are homegrown, and that it is through listening that equitable school transformation can and will occur.

Listening Leadership has the power to help leaders address some persistent problems that have existed in American schools for some time. One example is inequity: many students continue to receive a substandard education. Further, the primary language of “school improvement” often serves to reinforce the status quo. We use the term “achievement gap,” when really students face an “opportunity gap.” We say we want “all” students to succeed, when the data shows that certain populations—such as ELLs—need more resources than other groups. We say, “We can’t let *those* students interrupt others’ learning” without examining why Black and Latino boys are disproportionately getting kicked out of class. Listening Leaders can listen for the ways we discuss school improvement and ensure that those whose voices have been marginalized feel safe to share their experiences.

Listening can also help counteract the demands staff feel during this test-and-punish era. It forces leaders to slow down and listen to colleagues and families in distress. This is particularly important at a time when students and communities are experiencing a great deal of trauma. Rather than asking children and adults to check their emotions at the school door, as leaders we can develop our emotional intelligence to learn to listen and attend to the feelings our school communities are experiencing. Finally, listening will help with one additional problem schools are currently facing: an overreliance on data that is removed from student experience. Sometimes data provides an overview of achievement but may not provide more specific reasons for *why* and how students are struggling. Listening Leaders pay attention to more than just large-grain “satellite” data (overall test scores) or even Level 2 medium grain “map” data (identifies subskill gaps like decoding or fractions). They also pay attention to fine-grain “street” data (the experiences of students, staff, and parents) through listening. This qualitative data allows them to make more informed decisions.

This book helps to develop leaders by focusing on three fundamental aspects of becoming a Listening Leader: awareness, relational capital, and complex change. Each of the three parts of the book will focus on one of these three areas.



Part I – Awareness

AWARENESS Core Tenets Equity Preparing to Listen	RELATIONAL CAPITAL	COMPLEX CHANGE
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What do I need to know and understand to become a Listening Leader?

Chapter 2 – THE CORE TENETS OF LISTENING LEADERSHIP

Part I provides an overview of the bodies of knowledge that underpin listening leadership—neuroscience, mindfulness, and equity.

What Listening Leaders Know About the Brain and How They Respond

Listening Leaders are successful because they understand how the brain influences human behavior, communication, and interaction and use this knowledge to guide their day-to-day actions and decisions. Understanding the brain is key because the brain has the power to fuel growth and learning in our schools *or* interfere with school transformation. The key to effective leadership is to make sure to respond in brain-friendly ways to the issues that arise every day. Below is an overview of the 5 tenets leaders should be aware of and how they can most effectively respond.

Listening Leaders know that...	So they respond by...
1. Our brains are primarily wired for survival.	<i>Feeding the lizard</i> – ensuring people have basic needs (food, movement, joy)
2. Our brains react to threats to our survival through fight or flight.	<i>Calming the amygdala</i> – being aware of the emotional states of others and themselves and listening in ways to calm these feelings
3. Our brains read social threats as survival threats.	<i>Reimagining rewards</i> – being aware of what is a threat or an award for others and expanding the types of rewards they provide (such as thank yous or other verbal appreciations)
4. Every brain will grow given the right conditions.	<i>Watering for deep roots</i> – investing time to make professional learning meaningful, teacher driven, and equitable
5. Organizations have core memories.	<i>Embracing “storientation”</i> – Providing your story as a leader, listening to the stories of others, and paying attention to the organization’s narratives

Tenet 1: The brain is wired for survival first. This means that when humans face a serious threat, their brains don’t slow down to think, instead an alarm is sent to the amygdala and their emotions take over. This is called an amygdala hijack. Leaders need to recognize when this is happening to someone and know how to listen in a way that will de-escalate the situation. The good news is that leaders can train themselves to recognize when this occurs in themselves and in others and respond by “feeding the lizard”—ensuring that basic needs are met. Even if you think it’s trivial that someone needs the printer to be fixed or to know the exact summer dates for PD, others may not be able to focus if you don’t provide this help. The same is true for physical needs. If you are not satisfying the bottom of Maslow’s hierarchy—like food—then it may be difficult for staff to focus if a meeting goes over an hour.

Tenet 2: Our brains react to threats by self-preservation. When the brain feels threatened, some people lash out, others walk away, while still others reach out to their social groups. In either case, as a leader it is important to listen to people in a way that calms the amygdala. You may feel you are not a therapist, but you are a leader who wants people to be able to function and contribute.

Tenet 3: Social threats trigger survival threats. As leaders, we need to become aware of the social context that may trigger people. For example, someone might feel threatened by the following (and the acronym SCARF can help you remember them): Status (Am I valued?), Certainty (Am I clear on what’s expected of me?), Autonomy (Do I have agency in my work?), Relatedness (Do I belong here?), and Fairness (Am I being treated justly?). It is helpful to become aware of these triggers.

Tenet 4: Every brain will grow given the right conditions. The discovery of the phenomenon of neuroplasticity has shown that the brain has an unlimited capacity to grow. However, learning does not happen instantaneously. In order to become skilled—that is, to act with automaticity—we must build up our neural pathways. That means learning something new must be accompanied by time to practice, reflect, and repeat again. Leaders must understand this in order to believe that every brain can grow. To create the “fertile conditions” for our staff members to grow, we must reject the plan to barrage them with initiatives and instead choose an instructional focus for the year and give teachers the chance to deepen their learning around this.

Tenet 5: Organizations have core memories. The human brain is hardwired to understand the world through stories, and organizations are no different—they have a collective story. Leaders who understand this try to reframe each point in the organization’s story to contribute to a more positive and healthy narrative that students and adults can carry with them. This means paying attention to the role of stories—or embrace “storientation”—as a means to achieve school transformation. Find ways to celebrate positive stories and own any mistakes so these don’t lead to a more negative memory for the organization.

Chapter 3 – LISTENING FOR EQUITY

Listening Leaders know that racial bias and cultural insensitivity can undermine a healthy culture and make school transformation impossible. Tuning in to structural racism, unconscious bias, and cultural difference complements knowledge of the brain and helps leaders create great schools.

To build equity, great leaders must first understand inequity. This means understanding the impact of structural racism—that education, housing, health care, and criminal justice produce racialized outcomes regardless of the intentions of individual people. As John A. Powell writes, “Racialized outcomes do not require racist actors.” When we hear statements like, “If only students had more grit or worked harder,” we know that this does not account for the unequal resources and opportunities available for all students. This statement is an example of the ways that unconscious bias plays out in schools even though the intended message is not to degrade. “We all carry biases from swimming in the waters of a racialized society.” To counteract this, it helps for leaders to take a few moments before speaking with a parent or colleague to consider any unconscious biases they may be harboring and to try to set those aside and genuinely listen to the person. Fortunately, it is possible to unlearn and interrupt these types of biases, and the first step is to listen with empathy. It is particularly crucial to tune into cultural difference given that we are living in a time when the number of students of color in public K-12 schools exceeds the number of White students, and yet around 83% of teachers are White. Also, it is important to note that there are cultural differences in the ways different groups approach communication, personal space, time, and respect. In fact, the dominant culture in schools privileges individualism, independence, “hard” skills over relational skills, competition, and quiet—many of which are viewed differently by nondominant groups. If we hope to lead across difference, we must first understand the dominant culture in schools as well as our own worldview.

Chapter 4 – GETTING READY TO LISTEN

One of the most important benefits of listening is that it builds trust—the foundation for leading and creating school change. While a number of leaders view trust as a soft skill or a nice add-on, research has shown that trust is the foundational glue necessary for any school improvement. Without trust, hard conversations would be essentially impossible—people would resist, flee, or head to the parking lot to commiserate with colleagues.

However, there is no shortcut to building trust—it takes time. The most comprehensive research on trust in schools—by Anthony Bryk and Barbara Schneider—shows that trust is built by daily interactions. As leaders, we need to consistently behave in trustworthy ways for our staff members and families to develop confidence in us. This chapter describes a school leader, Bianca, who felt unsettled because when a teacher approached her in the hall with a concern, she was unprepared and brushed him off. This small gesture may have been seen as a small betrayal on the part of the teacher, but it has the potential (through “storification”) to grow in people’s minds and contribute to a negative culture. Instead, if Bianca had only paused and listened, she could have created an opportunity for the opposite of betrayal—to connect and build trust. Leaders must understand that every bid for their attention—from emails in the inbox to knocks on the office door—are daily opportunities to build trust *or* to undermine it. If we view these daily demands for our attention—the parent with the concern or the staff member with the dilemma—as opportunities to care and attend to those around us, we can begin to build trust through listening.

So, how can we listen in a way that engenders trust? By developing our skills in *mindful listening*. Below are three key mindful listening steps to complete as you prepare to listen to someone.

Step 1: Look in the mirror: Examine your own thoughts and feelings about this person. *Why am I reacting strongly to him?*

Step 2: Step into the other person’s shoes: Try to perceive the interaction through the other person’s perspective. *What does she need right now to be heard or to find a solution to a problem?*

Step 3. Step up to the balcony: Imagine yourself as a neutral observer as you watch this interaction. *How does this critical distance help you gain perspective?*

Part II – Relational Capital

AWARENESS Core Tenets Equity Preparing to Listen	RELATIONAL CAPITAL Deep Listening Stances Strategic Listening Stances	COMPLEX CHANGE
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How do I build the interpersonal currency needed to support and develop adult learners?

This part focuses on how leaders can build relational capital—improve relationships with all adults in the school—by learning to listen. Every time someone approaches you, you have the opportunity to put “cash” (relational capital) in the bank by listening. Later, when you need to make a “withdrawal,” to enlist someone to support a change or back you up, you will have invested enough in the relationship to do this because of your listening. Two types of listening are introduced here—Deep Listening and Strategic Listening. The former type of listening is when you listen with no agenda, simply to support. The latter is when you listen with the goal to influence the person (like in supervisory meetings). Both types of listening are necessary because without listening to the concerns and needs of humans, school transformation is not possible.

Key Listening Stances	Description	Examples
Deep Listening Stance 1: Attention to nonverbal cues Deep Listening Stance 2: Mature empathy Deep Listening Stance 3: Affirmation	Listening with no agenda to support someone by allowing him/her to release emotion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A teacher is upset about a student fight • A parent is in distress about her child • A colleague vents about a policy change
Strategic Listening Stance 1: Orientation to vision Strategic Listening Stance 2: Reflective inquiry Strategic Listening Stance 3: Bias toward action	Listening to influence the thinking, practice, or behavior of the other person	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supervisory one-on-one meetings • Post-observation debriefs • Coaching conversations

Chapter 5 - DEEP LISTENING

This is the type of listening you do when someone comes to you in distress and you make a point to turn off your “fix it” mentality to just let him release his emotion. As Thich Nhat Hanh defines it, Deep Listening is “the kind of listening that can help relieve the suffering of the other person... compassionate listening. You listen with only one purpose: help him or her to empty the heart.” To do this, you must listen without an agenda. A few basic principles underlie a Deep Listening approach. First, that power comes from relationships. A compelling idea is not enough to drive an initiative forward. You need the “buy in” of the people to get anything accomplished. Second, you need to meet people where they are, not where you want them to be. And finally, emotional distress interferes with clear thinking. For this reason, you need to attend to the feelings and emotions of the adults, not as a nicety, but to get things done. Below are the three stances, from the chart above, that comprise Deep Listening.

DEEP LISTENING STANCE 1: Attention to Nonverbal Cues

A critical part of being a Listening Leader is the ability to attend to nonverbal cues. Some research shows that *less than 10%* of meaning is conveyed through words: 55% of meaning comes from nonverbal cues and 38% from tone of voice. While leaders may be used to carefully crafting their words, they may be less skilled in their nonverbal communication. In addition, a lot of nonverbal communication is subconscious. However, you *can* learn to train yourself to listen and pay attention to nonverbal messages. To begin to do this, look for the person’s:

- | | |
|---|--|
| facial expression (frowning, laughter) | body language (nodding, hunched over, stepping back) |
| eye contact (direct, averted, increased blink rate) | breathing patterns (slow, quick) |
| physical space (leaning in, keeping distance) | tone of voice (animated, quivering) |

DEEP LISTENING STANCE 2: Mature Empathy

Empathy is when we can see a situation from another person’s point of view. Mature empathy takes this a step further in that in addition to *understanding* the other person’s experience, we respond with compassion by actively listening and validating their experience. This can be hard for leaders who are used to always fixing people’s problems. However, this is the time to listen and empower the other person to make better decisions. This stance involves:

- Pausing to consider the other person’s experience and your own feelings so you don’t get triggered
- Actively listening (*What I hear you saying is... Is there anything else you think I should know?*)
- Validating the person’s experience even if you don’t share it (*I hear your concern... That must be tough... thanks for sharing.*)
- Ask what the person needs; don’t assume (*What can I do to support you?*)

DEEP LISTENING STANCE 3: Affirmation

Because humans have a negativity bias, and as Safir writes, “negative feedback sticks to our brains like Velcro,” leaders need to practice affirmation to build staff confidence. This can include small acts like offering support or leaving a note of appreciation in a teacher’s mailbox, all of which will be appreciated because humans crave positive feedback, particularly from people they respect. Improved staff confidence will serve as a foundation for any school improvement efforts.

Chapter 6 - STRATEGIC LISTENING

Having mastered the skill of Deep Listening, leaders will now have built the relationships needed so they can practice *Strategic Listening*: when you *do* have an agenda and want to influence someone’s thinking or behavior. This still requires care and compassion—you can’t just jump in with your judgments and expect someone to change. Safir was recently asked “Why can’t I just *tell* people how to improve? Isn’t this more efficient than all of this listening business?” Her reply was, “Does it work?” In her experience, telling adults to change fails 9 times out of 10. Instead, with Strategic Listening leaders learn to provide the right prompts and space for someone to reflect and ultimately make a change. Below are strategies to help build this skill.

STRATEGIC LISTENING STANCE 1: An Orientation to Vision

When you have an orientation to vision, you not only *listen for* a person’s goals and vision, but you help to redirect her so she can get back on the path toward achieving her vision. In a conversation, this might mean asking, *What is your vision for this year? What would success look like? What are your hopes and dreams for [this classroom, this team, this school]?* Guiding a staff member to articulate her vision is an important step in helping her to get on that path and make important changes.

STRATEGIC LISTENING STANCE 2: Reflective Inquiry

This stance lies at the heart of Strategic Listening. Leaders pose the types of tough questions to help staff grapple with data and serve as a supportive coach along the way. The goal is to build the person's capacity by examining student learning *and* teacher practice. To do this, you might ask questions such as:

Tell me how you understand this problem.

If you take a step back for a moment, what's a different way of seeing this challenge?

When have you had success addressing a similar problem?

What if you tried... what might you learn?

STRATEGIC LISTENING STANCE 3: A Bias Toward Action

Bias is used here in a positive way, as in, a tendency toward action. It means that you expect the teacher to try new practices and that it is OK to fail in doing so as long as the teacher examines the failure. In order to encourage teachers to experiment with new approaches, leaders must first communicate trust and a belief in a culture of innovation. Only then does it work to ask the following:

Now that we've debriefed the lesson plan, let's take a minute to improve it—what one or two changes would you make?

As a result of this conversation, what one new instructional move will you try tomorrow?

Let's take a few minutes for you to practice the instructional move you've identified...

What are you going to prioritize next, and how can I support you and hold you accountable for your goal?

When you want to have a conversation focused on teaching, learning, and reflection—an *instructional conversation*—it helps to integrate the six listening stances outlined above. By tuning in to the teacher's emotional state (nonverbal cues), you will be better able to relate to the teacher on a human level (mature empathy) and begin to connect the conversation to larger school or teacher goal (orientation to vision). Then by naming one successful practice observed (affirmation), you can lay the groundwork to focus the majority of the meeting on questions that probe the teacher's thinking (reflective inquiry) and close by identifying an actionable next step (bias toward action). There's a template in Appendix C you can use to plan for and be intentional about this conversation and below is a sample with some questions filled out in the third column:

Steps	Stance	I'll say or ask...
1. Open	Mature empathy	Connect with affective questions: <i>How are you? How did [...] go?</i>
2. Frame	Orientation to vision	Set a clear intention: <i>I want to anchor us in [your goals/the school's instructional focus].</i>
3. Prime	Affirmation	Prime the brain for learning: <i>I want to commend you for...</i>
4. Probe	Reflective inquiry	Assess by surfacing the teacher's thoughts first: <i>How did you feel about the lesson? What part of the lesson would you like to reflect on together today?</i>
5. Focus	Reflective inquiry	Model a focus on learning: <i>Let's look at this [data/student work] I collected. What gaps do you see?</i>
6. Prepare	Bias toward action	Identify a next step: <i>What's one instructional move you could try? Let's practice it.</i>
7. Close	Mature empathy	Assess verbal and nonverbal cues: <i>How do you feel about working on this issue?</i>
Post-conversation reflection for you as the leader		How did it go? What worked and didn't work?

Chapter 7 - LISTENING TO PARENTS

Listening to parents is a crucial component of school transformation, yet it can be challenging to accomplish, particularly when there are barriers to parent involvement. For example, issues like transportation, housing, work schedules, and access to child care often make it difficult for parents to get involved with or even communicate with school staff. In addition, there may be other barriers between parents and school personnel such as cultural, economic, or other differences that may strain communication. To begin, it helps leaders navigate differences with parents if they understand the effects of structural racism (as was introduced in Chapter 3). Families may not be able to get to school because of the issues mentioned above, or they may have trouble connecting with the school because they experienced *generations* of educational alienation. Leaders who practice *mature empathy* and *affirmation* can begin to establish trust in these cases. Further, it helps when leaders examine their own unconscious bias toward and cultural differences with families. For example, leaders might be able to be more sensitive if they understand that research shows parents of color do not like the more formal, business-like tone of parent-teacher conferences and would prefer more open and informal opportunities to be heard by teachers. Attending to cultural differences like these will help to build parent-school partnerships. In addition, there are some more tips for the Listening Leader below.

Interrupt the negative talk about parents. Set the tone for respectful discourse about families. Every time you hear, *Parents don't value education*, try to refocus the conversation on assets, *What do our families have to offer?*

View parents as experts. As the leader, model the assumption that parents are the experts when it comes to their children and we must listen deeply to hear what they have to contribute about their children.

Listen to understand. Reframe how you view it when a parent approaches you; this is actually an additional point of data, even if it is tough to hear what parents have to say. Try to calm the parents and stay curious as you listen with mature empathy about their experience, hopes, and dreams

In addition to the above approaches, there are several structures schools can put into place to listen to parents. Implementing several of these will help you to build a parent-inclusive culture.

1. *Parent one-on-ones*: To build relational capital with families, conduct informal, 20- to 30-minute informal one-on-ones with families. Start by choosing five families you'd benefit from developing a relationship with and inviting them in, "I'm making a commitment to build stronger relationships with families and I would like to invite you in for me to listen and learn from you." Ask how their child learns best, when she was really successful in school, and what concerns the parents have about the child.

2. *Home visits*: Visiting parents at home can help ease tension between school and home. To emphasize the importance of listening to parents, you can build home visits into the PD schedule, perhaps sending teachers in pairs or teams to visit homes. Done well, these visits can truly transform relationships with families.

3. *Parent surveys*: Using parent surveys to listen to parents will allow you to reach an even wider group of families. An anonymous survey allows parents to be honest about the current state of parent engagement. One idea is to send out a survey after conferences to ask families about their experiences. Make sure to reflect on the data you collect and consider how you will respond.

4. *Focus groups*: Because it can be time consuming to conduct individual home visits, you may want to consider hosting focus groups of parents. These groups can discuss a wide range of questions from, *How can we better serve our English language learners?* to *What supports should we offer families as we prepare students for college?*

5. *Community walks*: This is an innovative way to learn about students and their communities. Have students and their families bring educators into their community to point out important places, leaders, or other aspects of the neighborhood. This is a powerful way to begin to listen more to parents.

Chapter 8 - LISTENING TO STUDENTS

Regardless of how student-centered your school is, students and adults occupy different roles and hold different perspectives. What works for the adults does not always work for the young people, so it is particularly important to listen to student voices. However, schools are not necessarily set up to do so. To be effective leaders we need to listen to what students think and feel. This means taking the time to listen so we can learn not just about their personal lives, but also about their intellectual lives as well. Deep Listening to students does *not* mean enabling dysfunctional behavior—that essay is still due, and we need to hold clear expectations for students. It means that we use the listening skills learned earlier (attention to nonverbal cues, mature empathy, and affirmation) to show compassion and ensure that students feel heard. Below are five ways to listen to students.

1. *Walk in their shoes*. Spend an entire day shadowing a student to learn about his experiences in school. Educators who do this walk away with critical new insights. For example, one high school teacher reported that she found: (1) students sit all day, which is exhausting; (2) high school students sit passively listening 90% of the time in classes; (3) you feel a little bit like a nuisance all day long. A few tips for this experiment: leave the suit at home and dress less conspicuously, consult shadowstudent.org, and start your day with the student at the bus stop or bike rack.

2. *Tell their stories*. There are a few ways we can learn more about students' personal histories and backgrounds. One teacher gave students sticky notes that said, "I wish my teacher knew..." and had students finish the sentences. She even posted the responses on Twitter with #IWishMyTeacherKnew—a really powerful means of "storientation." Another idea is to conduct a student fishbowl in which 6 to 10 students sit in a circle for a discussion while staff sit in a larger circle to listen to the conversation. Students might be asked to discuss anything from, *What are your favorite things about school?* and *What do you think should be improved at school?* to *What can your teachers do to help you learn better?* If students don't feel comfortable with this, you can conduct audio interviews with students and play these at staff meetings.

3. *Ask them how you're doing*. Require that staff regularly solicit and use student feedback. This can be with feedback surveys or feedback interviews. Teachers can ask about the success of a particular unit or more generally, *What do you like best about this class?* *What would you like to change about the class?*

4. *Give them a voice in class*. There are several routines teachers can use to regularly bring student voice into the class. For example, the **one-word check-in** routine allows students to share one word that captures how they feel in one word, such as, "distracted" or "irritated." Another routine teachers can use is the **talking circle** to create a humanizing space in which everyone speaks equally (see Appendix E for details).

5. *Organize the classroom around their ideas*. Teachers will be able to listen much more to students if they stop lecturing as much. Instead, they can structure their classes in a way that involves asking students more questions and getting them more engaged, such as through **inquiry-based teaching**. With this approach, teachers frame challenging questions that lead to thoughtful discussions. Rather than giving students the answers, teachers change their role so they ask questions.

Part III – Complex Change

AWARENESS	RELATIONAL CAPITAL	COMPLEX CHANGE
Core Tenets Equity Preparing to Listen	Deep Listening Stances Strategic Listening Stances	Influencing Change Listening Routines Listening Culture

How do I diagnose and navigate the challenges I face as a leader?

Chapter 9 - INFLUENCING COMPLEX CHANGE

1. Understand the features of a complex living system

As we try to bring about significant change, we need to be aware of an uncomfortable paradox about leadership—although we are in charge, we are not *in control*. In the end, staff and students need to make their own way forward. This means that our role is more about creating the conditions and providing the guidance people need to do their work. It is not surprising that during this test-and-punish age, leaders have rushed in to control with structural or quick fixes—buying that new curriculum, rolling out innumerable PD initiatives, etc.—without much thought to the *human* dimension of change. These types of fixes only work if change is linear, measurable, and predictable—which is not how change works in *schools*. The truth is that school transformation does not follow this path. Whether you lead a school, a team, or a district, you are leading a **complex, adaptive system, or living system**. It is “complex” because it involves human interactions which are always evolving and unpredictable. It is “adaptive” because human behavior continually reacts, responds, and changes to events. When we try to control staff, we ignore the reality of this type of system. We need to understand that change is complex, rarely linear, and deeply dependent on the initial conditions of the organization.

2. Diagnose the types of challenges you face as a leader

If the first step as a leader is to understand our complex living system, the next step is to *diagnose* the particular challenges we face in our unique situations. In our work to influence change, we first need to understand what *type* of change is needed. One way to think about the problems we face is to divide them into **technical problems** and **adaptive/complex challenges**. Technical problems are those for which we already have a solution. For example: designing a master schedule or training teachers to use pacing guides. We can address these types of problems with technical expertise—training, adjusting structures, creating work plans, etc. However, **adaptive/complex challenges** are ones for which individuals do not yet know the solutions. Often these result from gaps between people’s values and their realities. For example, if there is a teacher who insists that lecturing is the best way to teach, we must work on changing his beliefs, priorities, and values. This is not a problem we can address with a structural solution. We can’t simply create a work plan or write up this teacher to get him to shift his teaching approach. There is a chart you can use to help you diagnose the challenges in your situation on p.196 and which is excerpted here:

DIAGNOSING CHALLENGES YOU FACE		
	<i>Technical Problems</i>	<i>Adaptive/Complex Challenges</i>
Definition	Problems for which a solution exists but require technical expertise and know-how to solve	Problems with no clear solution that require social processes like listening and dialogue to address
Decision making	The process is: collect data, analyze data, respond with a strategy to drive toward a quantitative goal	The process is: engage in inquiry, create opportunities for dialogue, guide, facilitate and influence—a nonlinear process driven by a shared vision
Examples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do we train our teachers to use pacing guides to meet district literacy goals? • How can we add AP courses to our schedule? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can we build teachers’ capacity to engage English language learners and special education students in complex content? • How can we ensure every child has access to a college-prep curriculum?

3. Influence—don’t control—complex change with a few key steps

Once we have a sense of the complex problems we face, below are six steps to follow to provide the guidance in the path forward. Here is an overview excerpted from p. 198 with more detail to follow:

SIX STEPS TO INFLUENCE COMPLEX CHANGE	
Step	Guiding Questions
1. Tell the Current-State Story	• What data (Levels 1, 2, and 3) do you need to understand the problem? What patterns emerge?
2. Name an Equity Imperative	• What pressing challenges emerge from the current-state reality? What is your vision of success?
3. Identify a Few Simple Rules	• What guiding principles will help your team stay true to its vision?
4. Create a “Skinny Plan”	• What is your short list of what you will do, will NOT do, and what’s your good-enough vision?
5. Establish a Few Clear Metrics	• How will you know you made progress? What Level 1, 2, and 3 data will you collect?
6. Distribute Leadership; Build Capacity	• How will you build a structure for distributive leadership? Who will lead which pieces of the work?

Step 1: Tell the Current-State Story – In order to begin to tell the story of your school or team, you need to collect different types of data: Level 1 “satellite” data like test scores, attendance and course passage, Level 2 “map” data measure like reading levels and algebra readiness scores, and finally Level 3 “street” data that you gather through listening and observing. Of these, the Level 3 data is the most helpful in understanding the current reality of complex problems—these are the stories we hear when we enlist our Deep Listening skills (introduced in Chapter 5). When you truly listen, patterns will start to emerge about *identity* (Who are we as an organization?), *relationships* (How do people talk about different relationships: student to student, student to teacher, teacher to leader, etc.?) and *information* (How does information flow and do people have access to the information they need?)

Step 2: Name an Equity Imperative – Once the data is exposed, people will react strongly and emotionally. You will need to develop a powerful imperative, or call to action, that will draw people together and empower them to move forward. This is a vision of transformation—like the Declaration of Independence! Below are two examples:

Current-State Story	Imperative or Call to Action
Our data reveals a deeply tracked school in which English speaking students progress toward college while English language learners stagnate in remedial classes without hope.	We commit to detracking our school to give everyone access to a college-preparatory curriculum. To build the confidence of ELLs we will run focus groups and prioritize home visits. Overall, we will reduce the college readiness gap between ELL students and English-speaking students to less than 10%.
Our current-state story shows that White, middle-class families engage in school structures while Black and Latino families feel unwelcome. This connects to a pattern from the reading data which shows a 15% gap in proficiency by 3 rd grade.	We will transform our school culture so that families of color feel welcome and participate in equal numbers to White families. We will also focus instructional improvements on accelerating the reading skills of our most struggling students. Overall, we will eliminate the racial literacy gap by the end of 3 rd grade.

Step 3: Identify a Few Simple Rules – To move forward with your call to action, you will want to develop a few simple rules to guide the effort. You might present the following question to your staff, “What simple rules can we create to guide all of our actions and decisions to help us stay true to our equity imperative?” After some brainstorming, be sure to limit the number of rules to no more than five or six. Below is an example of five sample rules for a district that wanted to address the adaptive challenge of implementing the Common Core State Standards:

FIVE SIMPLE RULES FOR A DISTRICT TO BEGIN IMPLEMENTING THE CCSS
Rule 1: The 1 st year of CCSS implementation will be about learning, not performing.
Rule 2: We will use culturally responsive teaching as our primary lens for implementing the standards.
Rule 3: We will design hands-on PD to support teachers to experiment with units and short inquiry cycles.
Rule 4: As district staff, we will deploy ourselves to schools to coach school leaders in designing this PD.
Rule 5: We will build the capacity of teacher leaders to facilitate collaborative inquiry.

Step 4: Create a “Skinny Plan” – Rather than a detailed strategic plan, you will want to create a “skinny plan” to address the call to action. Think about what needs to be eliminated from past initiatives to get down to the basics of what your organization needs to move forward—what is the key learning for students and adults. With four simple questions, you can create a “skinny plan.”

1. What is our “good-enough” vision of success for this year? (What would success look like on July 1, 2019?)
2. What are our “must-dos”? Brainstorm, then ask, “Can we achieve our vision without this?” If the answer is yes, cross it off!
3. What are we NOT willing to do to make progress? Make a formal list to actually name what you are not willing to do.
4. Who will lead each big piece of the work, and what support will they need?

Step 5: Establish a Few Clear Metrics – What evidence will you use to assess progress on your skinny plan? Make sure to go beyond simply meeting goals like “increasing test scores by 10%” to examine all levels of data: Level 1, 2, and 3.

Step 6: Distribute Leadership; Build Capacity – Principals and assistant principals alone cannot achieve complex change. They need to distribute leadership and develop the capacity of formal and informal teacher leaders. Schools with distributive leadership often have a *representative structure* (each member of the central leadership team leads another team), *clear roles* (each team has clear roles and responsibilities), *interdependence* (the central leadership team functions as a PLC), *a collaborative culture* (team members feel ownership for the work), and *consistency* (the leadership team meets regularly, at least twice a month).

Chapter 10 - LEVERAGING LISTENING ROUTINES

Meetings are the foundation upon which much of our listening culture is built. Educators spend a tremendous amount of time in meetings—staff meetings, department meetings, grade-level meetings, district trainings, professional development, and more. If these meetings are not carefully crafted with thoughtful agendas, then those meetings become a waste of time. But done well, these meetings have the power to shift the conversation and lead to real change. To do this, leaders must put as much thought and care into designing these meetings as their best teachers do for lesson plans. A great meeting should follow the arc of the three Strategic Listening stances introduced in Chapter 6 as outlined below:

Using the Strategic Listening Stances to Plan Adult Learning		
Orientation to Vision (Stance 1)	Reflective Inquiry (Stance 2)	Bias Toward Action (Stance 3)
Begin with a compelling hook or activity that communicates the “why.” Invite people to participate in activities that help them gain insight into the problem.	Allow people to make meaning together and integrate their learning.	Identify concrete next steps.

This chapter outlines how to do the above, but first, the leader must be aware of the mood and receptivity of staff before doing so.

Diagnosing and managing the group dynamics of your team or staff

Every team has its own culture and it is important for the leader to gauge when something feels “off.” Some teams get stuck in unproductive dynamics such as low trust, lack of shared language, new initiative fatigue, and more. Below are four types of group dynamics to be aware of:

- Emotional Repression:** This is when participation is low because people don't speak up out of a fear of backlash from admin.
- Cool Compliance:** The group is compliant, but discussions are superficial with no creative, divergent or authentic thinking.
- Rising Anxiety:** Team members feel tense, anxious or vulnerable—often when a group is first forming or the leader is top-down.
- Amygdala Hijack:** The group is in distress and members enter fight or flight mode making explosive comments and walking out.

Once you've made a diagnosis of the team's dynamic, you need a set of facilitation moves to address what's happening. Below are possible moves along with sentence stems you might use:

Facilitation Moves to Address Challenging Group Dynamics	
Key Move	Sounds Like...
Name to neutralize	<i>It seems like there's a lot of passion about this issue. At this point it's clear and it's okay that we have different perspectives on the issue.</i>
Affirm	<i>Thank you—I appreciate you taking a risk to share your thoughts. I love that we are a team where people can disagree.</i>
Inquire	<i>What do other people think about this issue? What are other ways to approach it?</i>
Redirect	<i>Thanks for your passion. We do need to move on but I hope we can continue the conversation another time. Thanks for raising that concern—I would love to take that up with you in our next one-on-one.</i>

Planning adult professional learning experiences

In planning professional learning experiences, principals often dive right into what they see as the “real work”—analyzing data, planning curriculum, or other activities. However, to be most effective, they need to help people feel relaxed and connected to do that “work.” This section includes some humanizing routines to help leaders plan for both relational outcomes (how you want people to feel during and after the meeting) as well as the technical outcomes (the deliverables, actions, or content). Below is an overview of four types of routines that make up the **experiential learning cycle** to help you craft a meeting that will address both types of outcomes. Note that the routines start with the affective and flow toward the practical.

THE EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING CYCLE FOR PLANNING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT		
Cycle	Short Description	Sample Routines
Affective routines (Start with the heat)	Helps people release emotion and connect with one another	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appreciations • Check ins • Community circles
Imaginal routines (Get your team to dream)	Helps people imagine what <i>could be</i> rather than what is	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brainstorming or visualizing activities • Responding to video clips or poetry • Four corners or quote mixers
Conceptual routines (Learn and reflect on new ideas)	Helps people learn or reflect on new content or ideas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Book study or text-based discussion • Data-based inquiry • Presentation of new instructional practices
Practical routines (Plan, practice, implement new ideas)	Helps people learn by doing, producing, or practicing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Curriculum planning • Engaging in collaborative planning or protocols

Affective routines include listening, reflecting, and empathizing in order to allow people to release emotions and connect with one another. One idea is to open and close every meeting with some type of affective routine. An example of an affective routine is to have everyone go around and share a success from their classroom or the best thing that has happened to them recently. Appreciations are another form of affective routine—a time for people to share their gratitude for one another.

Imaginal routines help staff envision what could be rather than what currently exists. This might involve visualizing, brainstorming or incorporating movement or the other senses. For example, you might have staff react to quotes or a compelling TED talk. Or you might send people to different corners of the room to discuss different aspects of a topic you want to address.

Conceptual routines help your staff learn and reflect on new ideas. Whether that learning is about literacy, math or social-emotional development you need to find engaging ways to introduce concepts such as conducting Socratic Seminars, creating portfolios of staff work, or using text-based protocols to discuss articles. Conceptual routines also include analyzing data to make predictions, observations, inferences, and plan actions. Another way to encourage critical thinking is to have staff do *sorting*—for example, take the standards for a grade and sort them into piles to determine which are most essential.

Practical routines give staff the opportunity to plan, practice, and implement new ideas. This might include lesson planning or examining student work. Overall, the goal is to have people apply what they've learned and take action. Protocols are useful for these types of routines. The Consultancy Protocol can be used to have staff share and analyze a dilemma. The “I Like, I Wonder” protocol is for giving feedback on any kind of proposal from curriculum to professional learning to communication. There are also useful protocols for looking at student work.

Chapter 11: GROWING A LISTENING CULTURE

This chapter will help you grow a larger listening culture in your school or district. Through reimagining your role and implementing some regular routines, you can provide the foundation for a powerful listening culture.

Reimagine Your Role—From Leader as “Hero” to Leader as “Host”

A newly appointed superintendent to a district that had had no district-sponsored retreats in 8 years decided to convene a meeting with his 15 urban school leaders. He began with a warm welcome, “I am so happy to welcome you here for 2 days of learning, planning, and team development. We chose this beautiful spot to invest in you and in our network.” Then he followed with some data to paint a picture to inspire action, “In our district, if 100 students start the ninth grade together, 67 will graduate high school, 46 will start college, and only 10 will graduate college within 5 years. We can and must transform this reality, together.” Rather than seeing himself as a “hero,” hired to save this district, he chose to reimagine his role. Instead, he saw himself as “host.” As a host, a leader pays attention to the physical arrangement for learning—a beautiful setting, snacks, quotes on the walls, colorful tablecloths. As a host, you can change the traditional feel of meetings, “Change the structure and you change the experience.” As a host, of course you welcome your guests warmly with a hug or handshake and exude warmth and lack of distress in interactions. Further, when hosts embrace storification—by collecting, arranging, and highlighting stories—they help to build a collective narrative filled with hope and possibility. And the whole reason a host brings people together is to create a safe space for deeper conversations. The routines that follow, along with the six stances of a Listening Leader introduced in Chapters 5 and 6, will help you to facilitate those meaningful conversations.

Implement Transformational Routines as a Foundation for a Listening Culture

To support your role as host, this section includes listening routines that when implemented regularly, are a game changer.

1. Annual or Biannual Retreats: Safir opens this section with a compelling request, “If I could convince you to make one high-leverage budget decision, it would be to allocate funds to implement off-site team retreats at least once a year, preferably twice, and ideally overnight. You’ll be astounded by the level of creative thinking unleashed by a simple change in venue.” Of course, this isn’t easy since everyone has a family and staff may need to get paid, but Safir believes it is worth it to plan a summer or mid-year retreat. On these retreats you can conduct a variety of activities. One idea is to have people share their core experiences that have shaped who they are as educators or leaders. Another idea is to set up a fishbowl discussion to discuss and listen to ideas about a new initiative. We often discuss data as a technical exercise, but this can let people share their feelings about current data and results as well. Retreats are excellent places to create “skinny plans” and work on planning for the year as well.

2. Listening Campaigns: To help you better understand concerns and get a clearer picture of the current-state story of your school, consider conducting listening campaigns. These structured one-on-one or small-group listening sessions allow you to collect qualitative, Level 3 street data so you can begin to outline your priorities. After asking rich questions that let people share concrete examples, you can sort that data so you can see some patterns. Consider creating a simple report—including quotes—that highlights both the strengths and challenges you unearthed.

3. Learning Leader Chats: If your school or district is large, this is an alternative to Listening Campaigns. You hold these chats onsite at different schools. One superintendent hosts these chats twice a year at each site and opens with, “I’m here to listen. If there’s some low-hanging fruit that I can take care of, I will. If there are more systemic things that I can take back and work on, I’ll do that...” When he heard that employees didn’t know how to apply for maternity leave, within a week he had a staff member create a graphic to explain this process. Upon hearing concerns about a district math initiative, he changed the rollout of his plan. This type of listening and feedback pay tremendous dividends to all involved. People feel listened to, trust is strengthened and real changes get made. As one participant said in a survey, “I appreciate that the superintendent wanted to hear about problems and not just talk ‘at’ us.”

4. Team One-on-Ones: These are regular, ongoing, nonevaluative meetings between a leader and a team member to promote the team member’s growth. Most leaders can only meet with about 10 people every week or every other week, so you may want to focus on meeting with department chairs, team facilitators, and grade-level leaders. You can train this group to lead one-on-ones with their team members as well. Be clear about the purpose—to listen, offer support, plan, or debrief classroom observations. These meetings open communication, build relationships, and are a great way to keep you apprised of what’s happening in the school. To ensure these meetings go well, here are a few important tips: never cancel unless it’s an emergency; set aside at least 30 minutes; employ the Six Stances; and take notes and be sure to follow up on next steps.

Whether you lead a school or a school system, these routines can help you build a listening culture which will open dialogue, develop the collective intelligence of your team, surface bottom-up solutions, and build trust. Hopefully the ideas in this book have convinced you that listening is a powerful strategy to transform your school. The simple act of listening is far from a receptive one—rather it moves us to pick up data from the smallest day-to-day encounters and consciously build relationships and capacity in all that we do. Our schools and school systems need more Listening Leaders at every level.

THE MAIN IDEA's PD Suggestions for Developing Listening Leaders

Use the following PD ideas with your leadership team or the leaders with whom you work. These suggestions focus on the ideas from Part Two and Three of *The Listening Leader*. Note there's a handout that goes with this (email Jenn for a copy).

Building Relational Capital: The Foundation for Creating Change

• **Understand Your Listening Style:** Share the four listening styles below with your leadership team and assign one corner of the room for each one. Ask leaders to go to the corner that best describes the way they typically *listen*:

1. A people-oriented listening style—focuses on the emotional and relational aspects of communication
2. A content-oriented listening style—centers on processing complex information
3. An action-oriented listening style—the listener prefers clear, efficient information
4. A time-oriented listening style—the listener has a preference for short, limited messages

In each corner, discuss advantages and disadvantages of this style. Then as a whole group discuss how the varied approaches to listening in *your* team might be affecting the dynamics of the group (for example, if one person is time-oriented and yet meetings ensure every voice is heard...)

• **Improve Supervision by Listening:** Bring in a video of one of your administrators debriefing a classroom observation with a teacher, or find one online (search “debrief classroom observation” for something like this: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iPVgagtkJrY>). Have the group watch the video and note which listening stances below the leader used and what these sounded like. Discuss – do you think this leader relied too heavily on certain stances or ignored others? What would be your feedback to this administrator?

Key Listening Stances	What this might sound like...
Deep Listening Stance 1: Attention to nonverbal cues (tone, body language)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “uh-huh,” “hmmm” • “How are you feeling about...?” “Why is this challenging?” • “I’m impressed by...” “I’ve noticed your strength in...”
Deep Listening Stance 2: Mature empathy (demonstrating compassion)	
Deep Listening Stance 3: Affirmation (reinforce the positive)	
Strategic Listening Stance 1: Orientation to vision (connect to larger goals)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “What would success look like at the end of this year?” • “What evidence supports that interpretation?” • “As a result of this conversation, what steps will you take?”
Strategic Listening Stance 2: Reflective inquiry (question to provoke new thinking)	
Strategic Listening Stance 3: Bias toward action (suggest trying new ideas)	

• **Improve Supervision by Listening:** Have each leader create a plan, using the format below, to have a debriefing conversation with a teacher whose class they have observed (tell them to do an observation *before* this meeting). Note that the steps include both Deep and Strategic Listening stances. Have them look at their observation notes and plan for their meeting with the teacher by filling in the third column below. See the format on p.5 of the summary, or p.143 or Appendix C of the book for more guidance in planning this conversation. Have leaders share their completed plans below in pairs and get feedback to revise.

<i>Steps</i>	<i>Listening Stance</i>	<i>I'll say or ask... (fill in below)</i>
1. Open	Mature empathy	
2. Frame	Orientation to vision	
3. Prime	Affirmation	
4. Probe	Reflective inquiry	
5. Focus	Reflective inquiry	
6. Prepare	Bias toward action	
7. Close	Mature empathy and affirmation	
Post-conversation reflection for you:		How did it go? What worked and didn't work?

• **Plan for Listening to Students and Parents:** Look at the five structures introduced in the book (and listed below) to listen to parents and students. As a leadership team discuss which structure from each category would fit best for your school and create an action plan to put these two ideas into practice.

To listen to parents (see page 6 of the summary or Chapter 7 for more information): (1) *Parent one-on-ones*, (2) *Home visits*, (3) *Parent surveys*, (4) *Focus groups*, or (5) *Community walks*.

To listen to students (see page 6 of the summary or Chapter 8 for more information): (1) *Shadow a student*, (2) *Have students tell their stories as a means of “storientation,”* (3) *Ask students how the staff is doing*, (4) *Help teachers learn ways to give students a voice in class*, or (5) *Help teachers plan to organize the classroom around students' ideas*.

• **Plan for Ongoing Listening to Your Teachers Throughout the Year:**

Plan One-on-Ones (30-minute biweekly meetings) for *all* teachers for the upcoming year with a school or team leader. Divide up teachers among your leadership team so no one has more than 10 teachers. Decide how you will introduce this to teachers (there's a sample introductory letter on pp.252-3 with tips and sample reflective questions). Have the leadership team take out their calendars and create a year-long plan to meet with each of their assigned teachers. Make it clear to the leaders that these meetings are their first priority and should only be canceled in the case of a true emergency.

Bringing About Change in Your School/District

• **Assess Leaders on a Controlling-to-Guiding Continuum:** Your leadership team will need to have trust to do this next exercise. Have the leaders on your team think about their own leadership styles when it comes to leading for change. Ask them to line up along a continuum from 1 to 10 based on how they see themselves. Label one side of the room a '1' and the other side a '10' and ask team members to physically stand somewhere along the continuum below and then discuss the paradox that Safir points out—although we are in charge, we are not *in control*. What implications does this have for us, as leaders, as we try to bring about change at our school?

1 = I try to create the conditions to allow staff to do the work they need to do.

10 = I try to map out how I want an initiative to unfold and then train, manage, and oversee staff to follow the initiative.

• **Plan to Use Listening to Surface Issues:** Plan a Listening Campaign for this summer/early fall to help you better shape your priorities for the '18-'19 academic year. Divide up the leadership team and plan a series of 30-minute listening sessions with a few representatives from a variety of stakeholders (families, students, teachers, district leaders, community members) to begin to listen to their needs. Fill out this chart to plan the Listening Campaign and ensure that the leadership team is on the same page:

QUESTION	OUR PLAN
What is our purpose for this Listening Campaign?	
Which people will we approach (choose from all stakeholder groups) and who from our team will meet with which person?	
During which dates will we conduct this campaign?	
How will we record what we learn?	
What questions will we ask each group of stakeholders?	
After the campaign, when will we meet as a group to act on what we've learned?	

• **Understanding Our School's Challenges:** Before coming up with solutions, it is helpful if your leadership team can better *understand* the challenges your school/district faces. First, have the team (preferably with data, results from the Listening Campaign above, and other resources) brainstorm some of the challenges your school/district is currently facing. Next, come to agreement about what *kind* of problems these are and place them in the appropriate column below

DIAGNOSING CHALLENGES AT OUR SCHOOL/DISTRICT		
	<i>Technical Problems</i>	<i>Adaptive/Complex Challenges</i>
Definition	Problems for which a solution exists but require technical expertise and know-how to solve	Problems with no clear solution that require social processes like listening and dialogue to address
Examples of this type of challenge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do we train our teachers to use pacing guides to meet district literacy goals? • How can we add AP courses to our schedule? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can we build teachers' capacity to engage English language learners and special education students in complex content? • How do we ensure everyone has access to a college-prep curriculum?
Actual examples at our school/district	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 2. 3. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 2. 3.

• **Assess Readiness for Distributed Leadership:** Conduct a leadership team self-assessment to determine if you have the necessary foundation for distributive leadership to address a complex/adaptive challenge. According to Safir, your team needs the five elements in the chart below to effectively distribute leadership. Have each member of the team individually rate each item on a scale of 1 (not at all) to 5 (absolutely!) then discuss as a team if more work needs to be put into distributing leadership:

Needed Features for Effective Distributed Leadership	Do we have this? Rate from 1 to 5
1. <i>A representative structure</i> (each member of the central leadership team leads another team)	
2. <i>Clear roles</i> (each team and team member has clear roles and responsibilities)	
3. <i>Interdependence</i> (the central leadership team functions as a PLC)	
4. <i>A collaborative culture</i> (team members feel ownership for the work)	
5. <i>Consistency</i> (the leadership team meets regularly, at least twice a month)	

• **Plan to Address a Complex Problem at Your School:** As a team, choose one of the complex challenges from the *Technical Problems/Adaptive Challenges* chart above to address. Then map out plans to follow the six steps to address this complex change below. For a fuller explanation of each step, see pages 7-8 in the summary or Chapter 9 in the book:

SIX STEPS TO INFLUENCE COMPLEX CHANGE	
Step	Our Plans
1. Tell the Current-State Story: What data (Level 1, 2, 3) do you need to understand the problem? What patterns emerge?	
2. Name an Imperative: Define a challenge that emerges from the current-state reality. What's your vision of success?	
3. Identify a Few Simple Rules: What guiding principles will help your team stay true to its vision?	
4. Create a "Skinny Plan": What is your short list of what you will do, WON'T do, and what's your good-enough vision?	
5. Establish a Few Clear Metrics: How will you know you made progress—what data will you collect?	
6. Distribute Leadership: How will you build distributive leadership? Who will lead each piece of the work?	