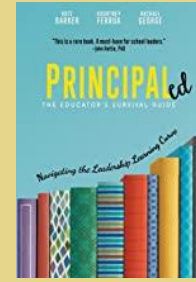




THE MAIN IDEA

current education book summaries



File: School
Leadership

PRINCIPALed: The Educator's Survival Guide

By Kate Barker, Kourtney Ferrua, and Rachael George (Dave Burgess Consulting, 2020)

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

The main ideas of the book:

- ~ Being a principal is one of the most challenging jobs out there.
- ~ These veteran principals share concrete strategies and inspirational ideas to help any school leader navigate this terrain artfully and actually enjoy the job!

Why I chose this book:

Most educators who led through this pandemic realized—if they didn't realize it before—that the role of principal is *human work*. Kate, Kourtney, and Rachael speak to leaders as humans and provide the kinds of inside tips a trusted mentor would share for how to gracefully deal with challenging interpersonal issues:

How do you have a hard conversation?

How do you solicit feedback from colleagues so you can grow?

How do you balance work and personal life so you don't burn out?

Not only are the tips practical and easy to implement right now, but many of the chapters have quick exercises you can complete and get something out of within minutes.

Plus, it's clear from the first sentence that these three women love their jobs and end up doing more than just showing you how to do this job well; they show you how to love it, too. This is a revitalizing book to read *now!*

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

- ✓ How to use **reflection** to grow yourself and your school
Learning from reflection, mentors, and feedback
- ✓ How to **focus** so you know where to start
Clarifying your purpose, going deep on 2 to 3 goals, and building on your strengths
- ✓ How to address the most challenging part of the job—the people—by **connecting**
Navigating different personalities, embracing hard conversations, developing your network, and continuing to learn
- ✓ How to **care** for yourself so the job doesn't eat you alive
Finding your work-life balance, showing grace and gratitude, and leading with love

Introduction

School leadership can be lonely, hard, unpredictable, and completely overwhelming. Leaders are expected to know the answers, be positive, and act calmly—even during a pandemic! At its heart, school leadership is truly human work that requires you to connect with your own humanity in authentic ways. To prevent you from feeling alone, the authors share what they’ve learned over 35 years of collective experience to show you how to lead in a way that prioritizes student achievement and elevates school culture while honoring your strengths, personal style, and time. Because so much of this work is about humans, they argue that to do this work well, you should focus on the pillars of *reflection*, *focus*, *connection*, and *care*—each of which is described in one part of the book.

Part One: Reflect

Chapter 1: Reflection & Refinement

Being an administrator can feel, in the words of the authors, like driving 90 miles an hour with your head out the window and your eyes closed. Yet the crucial first step to making any progress as a school leader is to stop and *reflect*. Where are you supposed to find that time to stop and reflect? Start small and simply identify what’s going well and what’s not going well. What is frustrating and what seems more fun or effortless? Ask others if you’re having trouble with this—you’re always doing more things right than wrong! Next, when you list what’s frustrating, identify the larger themes and determine if they are things you can control. Try making a list like this:

<i>Frustrations</i>	<i>Larger Theme</i>	<i>Can I control/influence this?</i>
E.g. PTA president slams me on Facebook	Relations with families	I cannot control his behavior
E.g. No time for observations	Time	I can work on my time management/ prioritize observations

As you reflect, you’ll notice the many areas in which your school needs improvement, such as culture/climate, instruction, teacher relations, etc. Obviously, all of these impact students in some way or another, but which ones have the *biggest impact* on student achievement? You’ll need to prioritize those. You absolutely need to address school culture, social emotional learning, and other challenges, but you need to address student learning *first*. There’s widespread agreement in educational research about key elements that increase student achievement: clear and engaging curriculum, assessments, feedback, professional collaboration, and high-impact teaching strategies.

Reflection can also help you address things like school culture and climate. Listen to staff and focus on what they’re saying more than their tone or method of delivery. When people complain, listen for and reflect on the underlying concern. Once you have a set of concerns, start small – use this reflection phase to identify just *two goals* to improve your school. You’ll get to the others later.

Rather than seeing reflection as just one more task you need to accomplish, know that it is critical for school improvement. Further, when you reflect and respond, you serve as a model of the school’s lead learner.

Chapter 2: Find Your People & The Power of Mentors

There’s no doubt that getting support from your biggest fans goes a long way to lift you up when you’re struggling, but it’s also important to find mentors who will challenge you and push you to grow by providing transparent feedback. It’s human nature to surround ourselves with people like us, but we must seek out diverse perspectives if we want to grow. The authors suggest finding three types of mentors: the **colleague-mentor**, the **professional network mentor**, and the **ugly cry mentor**.

Colleague-mentor	Professional network mentor	Ugly cry mentor
Helps navigate the systems of your district	Inspires you to see the big picture	Has seen you at your worst, still your biggest fan
⇒ Could be a veteran administrator in your district	⇒ Could be a leader in another district	⇒ Provides deep dialogue and refreshing insights
⇒ Keep conversations to work-safe topics (avoid district politics)	⇒ Someone who inspires you and stretches your thinking	⇒ Can keep a secret
		⇒ Will be brutally honest with you

You can find mentors in many places: professional organizations; conferences; district, regional, or state committees; work groups; or your personal life. Mentors can even include people outside of education: wise family members or close friends who know you well.

Strike up a conversation first! Don’t just walk up to someone and ask if they’ll mentor you out of the blue. Choose mentors who are able to make time for you, and don’t forget to give back—is there a project you can help them with? Can you lend an ear or give feedback about something? Carve out a standing monthly date with at least one of your mentors. Don’t cancel when you feel overwhelmed—those are the times you need your mentors the most!

Chapter 3: Receive Feedback With Style

Feedback is about learning, not performance, so we have to be curious about it. Education researchers have even argued that feedback is the most powerful aspect of teaching and learning. What distinguishes successful school leaders from unsuccessful ones is the ability to recognize and incorporate feedback. It can be uncomfortable, even annoying, to receive feedback, especially when it comes from people who seem to be negative, but it's crucial to relax and tune in if you want to grow. Invite critics to share why they think what they think, and ask them clarifying questions to uncover new perspectives (see the chart below for sample clarifying questions).

Asking for feedback then refuting it or ignoring it is one of the most damaging things we can do! Use these questions to accept feedback with grace and avoid becoming defensive:

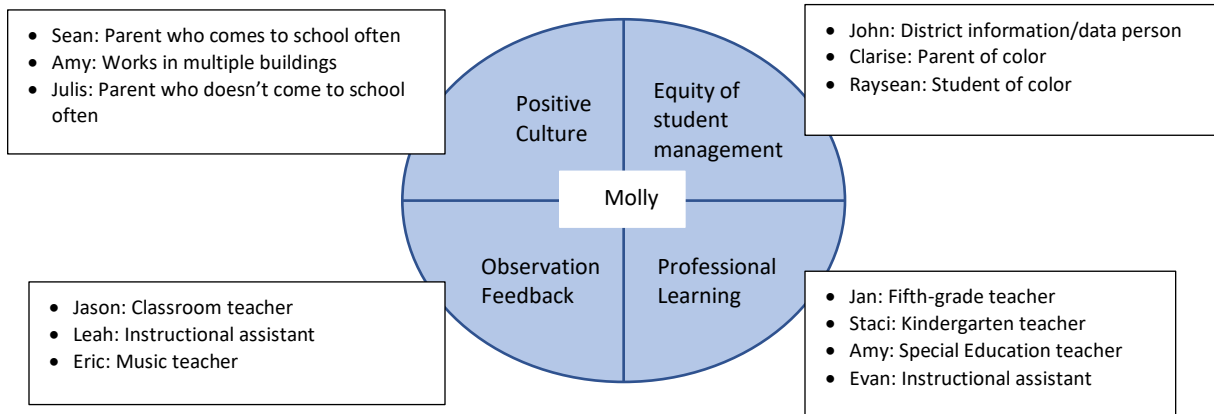
- Tell me more.
- What might that ideally look like?
- What do you mean by _____?
- How might you approach _____ if you were in a similar situation?
- Can you give me an example of _____?

It's important to create systems to get regular feedback. Kate originally thought people would waltz in and give her feedback—they didn't. So, you need to systematically ask for it because you can be sure that whatever's not given a chance to be shared with you directly will be shared behind your back. Some ideas for seeking feedback include: regular surveys, exit slips after meetings, one-on-one meetings throughout the year with each staff member, and monthly meetings with union representatives.

Finally, seek feedback from multiple stakeholders to get a more complete picture of how your school feels for everyone involved. If you only ask staff and students for feedback, you're missing opportunities to learn and grow. Consider those you might not consider asking such as itinerant district staff, new students, parents who do or don't visit the school often, and custodial staff. Use the feedback web exercise below to identify multiple stakeholders for providing feedback.

Exercise: Feedback Web

Steps: 1) Put your name in the center. 2) In each quadrant around your name write one topic that is important for you to receive feedback on. 3) For each of the topics, write the names of people who could give you valuable feedback. Remember to vary your stakeholders to get a more complete picture! Example:



Rachael was deeply impacted by the ideas for *receiving* feedback from [Thanks for the Feedback: The Science and Art of Receiving Feedback Well](#) by Douglas Stone and Sheila Heen. Click on the title to see THE MAIN IDEA's summary of this powerful book!

Part Two: Focus

Chapter 4: Clarify Your Purpose

There's always too much to focus on as a principal: systems that need updating, staff who need support, outdated instructional strategies that need to be weeded out, etc. It's hard to know where to start. However, the authors argue that when you ground yourself in a *clear purpose*, you start to approach your priorities through the lens of your vision and educational beliefs. In addition to having an "elevator speech" that you use to communicate with students, families, and community members, *knowing your purpose* will keep it in your mind's eye as you do this important work. Journal about the following questions to help uncover your purpose.

- What compelled you to go into education?
- What still drives you to continue this work?
- Describe 2 moments from a typical day that make it crystal clear how meaningful this work is.
- What are some ways your passion comes out when you interact with staff and students?

After reflecting, create a short phrase of 1 to 6 sentences. This is your "elevator speech"!

It's critically important to create a *shared* vision with your staff that incorporates *their own* purpose as well. Use meeting time for staff to answer the above questions and create their own 1- to 6-sentence vision statement. Next, let everyone share and identify common themes—this will help your team shift from individual thinking to a shared goal—that will positively impact students. When you have your collective vision, write it down, hang it up for all to see, and share it far and wide. Keeping the focus on this vision will help it come to life in all the decisions you make for your school. And you know how many thousands of decisions there are to make!

Although there are many tasks and demands on your time, having a clear purpose will help you prioritize. Use the tool below to decide how aligned tasks are with your vision (weakly or strongly) and whether these tasks are essential or optional.

Aligned to Our Vision		
	Weakly Aligned	Strongly Aligned
Essential	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Processing behavior referrals • Completing a state report • Return a phone call from a community member • Sifting through inbox <p>(SCHEDULE a time to do these.)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Giving feedback to data teams • Creating professional development • Recognizing staff • Schedule post-observation conferences • Creating a schedule that maximizes instruction <p>(PRIORITIZE these first.)</p>
Optional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scheduling an assembly • Organizing and color-coding files <p>(DELEGATE these tasks.)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reviewing curriculum for next year • Researching master schedule alternatives • Updating the parent website <p>(PLAN to do these at a less urgent time.)</p>

Chapter 5: Decide to Go Deep

This chapter is all about saying no to hundreds of good ideas and instead focusing deeply on 2 to 3 good ideas for improvement in one school year. As shown in the last chapter, it's important to focus on goals that align with your vision and help you move forward as a school. There will be time to address more areas after a year or two of success, but first, focus deeply on doing a few initiatives well.

How do you know whether to prioritize attendance, phonics, or behavior? The following critical questions will help you get started in determining your focus areas. These are questions that you and your staff should be able answer about every student at any given time:

- ⇒ What is the data telling you about student learning?
- ⇒ How are standards being used in instruction?
- ⇒ What teaching strategies are being used?
- ⇒ Are students growing and how do you know?
- ⇒ How does it feel to be at your school?

The authors argue that you have to look at *data*, *standards*, *strategies*, and *climate* to help you choose areas of focus.

<p style="text-align: center;">Data</p> <p>Look at behavioral and attendance data in addition to assessment data. Noticing trends within groups will help you determine if everyone is growing. Look at trends within gender, race, language, poverty level, etc. Also look at the staff who teach these students—consider them by grade level, department, or teaching experience. Ask yourself why a particular student or staff group is growing while another is not.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Strategies</p> <p>Curriculum comes and goes, but good strategies are forever. Go deep by selecting 2-3 strategies that every teacher can use no matter their content area. Choose strategies that get all learners engaged such as turn and talk, thumbs up, whiteboards, or assigned roles within groupwork. Whatever strategy you choose, as the leader be sure to teach, model, reinforce, and repeat.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Standards</p> <p>These are the foundation of teaching. All staff must be teaching from standards to ensure equity across classrooms. Our students deserve it. Teachers may want to teach an old favorite lesson that they've been teaching for 25 years, but if they can't show you how it relates to designated standards, they shouldn't teach it.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Climate</p> <p>No matter how great our curriculum, strategies, or data analysis are, if students and staff hate being at school, we'll never make progress. It's important to have systems for generating joy and fun. Try adding a culture committee who takes on initiatives to create a positive culture.</p>

Once you look at these areas, it's easy to get overwhelmed and try to do it all. But go back to your purpose and vision (from the last chapter), and narrow your focus. It's easy to be the principal who, in difficult times, says "This isn't working" and abandons an initiative. But this leads to too many focus areas and lots of confusion. Change doesn't happen overnight. Commit to 3 focus areas.

Choose focus areas carefully and execute them well, fully, and with purpose. Also, keep the “4C’s” in mind when implementing goals:

- ⇒ **Core instruction:** Make sure all teachers agree on outcomes and get support in becoming excellent teachers.
- ⇒ **Culture:** Hear all voices, cut out hierarchy, and help the space feel safe and welcoming for adults.
- ⇒ **Collaboration:** This is a key to school improvement. Carve out consistent schedules for teams to collaborate.
- ⇒ **Communication:** Vary your communication methods to reach everyone. Talk about your school’s priorities and updates through emails, tweets, notes in mailboxes, newsletters, videos, and more.

No matter your focus areas for school improvement, find ways to hold yourself accountable. Here are some ideas:

- Use the Boomerang email extension to write to your future self (“Hey, January’s a great time to focus on teacher clarity.”)
- Write yourself to-do emails and schedule delivery for the future months.
- Draft reflections about your initiatives and have them come to your email throughout the year.
- Create repeating events in your calendar to prompt yourself to reflect on your goals: “Am I giving feedback on…”
- Include your goals at the top of every weekly staff memo or staff meeting agenda.
- Add your goals to your walkthrough protocol and include concrete actions for each goal.

Chapter 6: Work Through Your Strengths

Sometimes it’s easier to beat ourselves up rather than recognize our own strengths. There isn’t a person alive who doesn’t have strengths, and when you give your full attention to your own, you can grow in amazing ways. Research shows that people have several times more potential for growth when they invest in developing their strengths rather than correcting their deficiencies.

The authors created the acronym STRENGTH to help you leverage your assets to be more resilient, productive, and authentic.

See	<i>Pay attention to your strengths.</i> What do you do well every day? Write down your strengths and tally each time you show those strengths. Try strength-assessment tools like Myers-Briggs, Enneagram, and Strengths-Based Leadership.
Target	<i>Target certain attributes and build on them.</i> Build on strengths you already possess rather than picking something that doesn’t come naturally to you. For instance, author Kate targeted her tendency to over-use email by trying other means of communication like social media, texting apps, and Google Docs.
Recognize	<i>Recognize that your greatest strength could also be your biggest weakness.</i> Be mindful of how your strengths can have drawbacks that impact yourself or others. For instance, if you’re empathetic and compassionate, this might be causing you to lose sleep over the problems of students, staff, or families.
Enlist	<i>Enlist the people in your circle to give you feedback on your perceived strengths.</i> It sounds awkward to ask for this feedback, like you’re fishing for a compliment, but frame it the right way and people will be happy to help. For instance, tell a supervisor you’re working on brevity during meetings and have her observe and give you feedback.
Narrow	<i>Narrow your focus to work on yourself before you start working on others.</i> This concept is true in our personal relationships and at work. It’s easy to look at how other people, systems, funding, parents, etc. fail us, but we have to focus on the only person we have control over—ourselves.
Gather	<i>Gather people around you who complement your strengths.</i> Being “well-rounded” and trying to do it all actually leads to mediocre leaders. Avoid being stretched too thin and taking on too much—instead, surround yourself with people who are strong in what you’re missing.
Transform	<i>Transform your leadership capabilities one person at a time.</i> Look at your existing team’s strengths and note what’s missing. Hire folks who can bring new strengths and complement your leadership qualities.
Heighten	<i>Heighten your creativity and productivity by surrounding yourself with people unlike yourself.</i> Some think it’s easier to lead people who are like you, but this won’t push your community to grow. If you’re a big picture thinker who allows details to go to the wayside, get someone on your team with a killer eye for detail.

Try using the Focus Chart below to identify how to use your strengths to tackle problems you’re facing.

- 1) Write a current problem you’re facing at the top.
- 2) Identify your strengths that relate to the problem and write them in the strengths column.
- 3) Next to each strength, write down how you can use that particular quality to approach the issue.

ISSUE: Lots of staff often arrive late to meetings	
Strength of Yours:	How to leverage it for this issue:
<i>Leadership</i>	<i>Keep arriving on time to lead by example.</i>
<i>Communication</i>	<i>Communicate expectations and why it's important to be on time.</i>
<i>Appreciating others</i>	<i>Appreciate and recognize those who arrive on time.</i>
<i>No BS attitude</i>	<i>Have hard conversations with those who aren't on time.</i>

Part Three: Connect

Chapter 7: Know Your People and Navigate Personalities

There are an overwhelming number of personalities, opinions, needs, and wants in your school community. And the truth is that one of the most challenging parts of being a school leader is *the people*. Getting to know people will help you anticipate their triggers, understand their verbal and nonverbal communication, and navigate the hundreds or thousands of interactions you have each day!

Know Your Staff

It will help if you understand that all behavior represents some type of communication. Try to understand this behavior before making any assumptions. Remember, your biggest superpower is getting to know your people. Find ways to *purposefully* get to know staff:

- Build in ways to connect in your meeting agendas before getting into the business
- Use Myers Briggs-like prompts to get to know staff members' personalities
- Stop by classrooms in the morning and say hi
- Sit with folks you don't know at meetings

Know Your Students

By getting to know your students and their stories you will be better able to help them grow academically. Start by simply getting to know students' names and how to pronounce them. You might add an adjective to each name that starts with the same letter of the name and exemplifies some trait about them (Fernando Freckles, Halima Haircut, etc.)

While names are the best place to *start* building strong relationships, next it's crucial to understand students as learners and whole people. How well do you know your students in terms of ***academics, attendance, behavior, and families?***

Academics: To get to know your students better academically, look at data with teams, attend PLC meetings, and watch teachers plan. Step in and facilitate a small group when you can. You might offer to monitor the progress of students or step in and teach 20 minutes of a class. Really knowing your students' ***academic strengths and challenges*** will help you know what opportunities, staff, schedules, and materials to provide.

Attendance: Don't make assumptions about ***attendance***, find out *why* students are absent. Set expectations for attendance early, and remember that the number one reason students don't attend school is lack of a positive connection with a caring adult. Be *that person* and make sure each staff member is that person for several students.

Behavior: Every school leader could spend their whole day on ***behavior*** issues. Don't! Be proactive by building positive relationships. Solid relationships are the root of good classroom management and the best balm against negative behavior. Students who feel they are valued and making progress will generally act in positive ways. Say hi, go to events, shoot some hoops, ask questions.

Families: Challenge any deficit views you have of ***families***. They're our number one partner in education. Brainstorm ways you and your staff can make all families feel heard, valued, and welcome. Involve them in all the decision-making you can. Treat conferences and home visits as opportunities to learn and ask questions. Rather than talking *at* families ask questions: *How does your child like school? How is homework? Does your child feel connected? What do you need from us to help your child feel more successful?*

Know Yourself

It's important to know staff, students, and families, but just as important to know *yourself*. Your past experiences without a doubt color your reactions and impact your leadership style. Are there adverse childhood experiences that have created certain triggers for you? Are there privileges you possess that your students do not? Have you explored your cultural biases? Do you have a strong grasp of systemic racism and how it affects your students? What are some ways you can better honor families' cultures? In order to lead others, it is important to know yourself. Try the Trait Analysis Chart to explore how your personality may impact your leadership:

Event	Personality Trait	Why	Impact
Death of a parent at young age	Controlling	I didn't have control over Mom's illness and death	I need to be cognizant of micromanaging my staff
Received a collegiate scholarship for soccer	Competitive/drive	In order to be successful, I always need to be competitive	I don't always need to be the best. I may need to work on my collaboration skills.
Your turn:			

Chapter 8: Embrace Hard Conversations

If school improvement is your goal, you *must* have difficult and uncomfortable conversations with lots of people. You'll need to talk to staff when they make bad instructional choices, say hurtful things to students, or act in ways that harm school improvement efforts. These conversations will benefit not only students, but staff who are learning and growing. Believe it or not, having difficult conversations can lead to the transparency, growth, and support teachers need to avoid burning out and leaving the profession within the first five years (the authors point out that this happens to an alarming 44% of new teachers!)

You'll also encounter families and community members who criticize your decisions, ignore your efforts, or even personally attack you. It's easier to avoid those people but having a hard conversation with them is what is needed to heal relationships and strengthen your school community. The authors outline some common responses to difficult reactions (the "six Ds") and how to navigate them:

Staff Reaction	Looks/Sounds Like	How to Respond	Conversation Starters
Dejected	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sad, hopeless • "I just can't ____" • "I've done everything!" • "I can't get him to do his homework" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognize their hard work and positive traits • Reassure them • Provide opportunities to develop strengths 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I saw you ____ (positive action). Could you try that again during...? • Have you considered...? • Can I help find some resources?
Defensive/Dismissive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "It's not my fault/job/in my power..." • "I've been teaching this for 25 years--I'm not changing it." • Nodding and smiling but doing their own thing • "I don't believe in this assessment." • "This is just another trend. It'll be gone next year, so why bother?" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acknowledge their discomfort • Provide a third point of reference like data, agenda, research, so the focus is off you and on the issue. • Thank them for their input and remind them of facts ("I know it's just one assessment, but it is research-based and everyone in the district is trying it.") 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I understand your point of view. Can I suggest... • The purpose of these assessments is to get us asking questions about student learning. What questions do you have? • What other data could you show that might be different? • You have so much to offer our school—how can I help you with this initiative?
Disengaged	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not making eye contact during meetings • Frequently absent during important meetings • Grading or checking email on phone • Claiming they have nothing to offer the conversation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discover the "why" behind the disengagement. • Remind them they have many insights to bring to the discussion. • Share the expectation that everyone will share their thinking during an exercise. • Give them a role in the meeting (notetaker, timekeeper, etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You are important to our shared success—what feedback could you give to make this a more productive meeting? • You looked distracted today. Is there something on your mind? • Remember that our shared norms include laptops closed and focused on the speaker.
Derogatory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "This is pointless/stupid." • "I'm not having that kid in my classroom!" • "I'm going to call the superintendent and tell them you aren't helping me." • Enlisting others to sabotage initiatives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create norms such as "keep critical comments for private conversations." • Don't react in the moment. • Acknowledge their frustrations, but remind them of the purpose of your meetings/initiatives. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We can't control who's in our classes. What can we control to help this student grow, and how can I support you? • I value you as a team member and would like you in this parent meeting. How do you feel regarding...? • I am so sorry (this goes a long way in calming people down).

The authors reiterate that challenging conversations are the way forward—they have the power to heal conflict and make our communities stronger. They suggest three ways you can call on your emotional intelligence to have hard conversations well:

- 1. Go in curious, not furious:** Seek to understand others' perspectives before reacting. If you feel you're going to react explosively, don't respond right away – wait a few hours or days. It is helpful to have a toolbox of prepared questions you can use like:
 - Can you tell me more?
 - Why do you think that happened?
 - How do you hope to resolve this?

Having a stance of curiosity keeps you from taking others' emotions personally, and it helps you solve problems and heal relationships. In addition to curiosity, it's important to be aware of how you're communicating nonverbally. Some studies show that up to 93% of communication is nonverbal, so ask yourself what your face and body language is saying to others. Also, giving wait time for others to respond is incredibly important too. Don't expand on your question if you're uncomfortable with someone's silence. Recall how students give the most thoughtful responses when given wait time. It's no different with adults.

- 2. Presume positive intentions:** Most people aren't trying to rub you the wrong way. Remember that everyone's behavior, no matter how negative, comes from a place of wanting what's best. The authors suggest using empathy to see their view of the problem. Even when someone's being unreasonable, acknowledge their feelings. For example, a parent is demanding that her daughter switches classes because she feels left out, but there is simply no room in the schedule. Try saying "It sounds like you want your daughter to belong and be connected with her classmates, right?" Then look at what you *can* control together: talking to the teacher to suggest more inclusive groupings, coaching the student on starting conversations and connecting with others, etc.

- 3. Find commonalities:** Most people want what is best for the school and the students. During difficult conversations, listen for what can be agreed upon, not for what you disagree on. And try to see past the person's tone if they're coming at you from anger, defensiveness, or accusation. Say you're giving feedback to a teacher about lack of engagement, but the teacher feels that plenty of students were engaged. Start with the acknowledgment that engagement is important to help students succeed, then provide the data.

The authors repeat that in addition to these three habits of mind, a crucial aspect of hard conversations is **controlling your emotions**. If you're stuck in a heated discussion and don't think you can respond well, get help from a team member, or excuse yourself until you can return in a calm, collected way. It's also important not to make decisions on the fly. Don't see yourself as the sole decision maker. Say: "That's a great idea. Let me take it to the team and see what they think, and we'll get back to you."

The authors also stress the **power of environment** and using **emotional intelligence** in difficult conversations. Preserve dignity—don't let a difficult conversation happen in the front office. Make sure your office is warm and inviting – physical environments have the power to soothe and calm. Sit next to the person, not behind your desk, and if possible, provide a third point of reference to focus the conversation. This could be research, referral notes, or observation notes—this can deflect negative energy off of you and make the dialogue more productive.

Further, always choose connection and kindness over being right or being the "strong leader." It's hard to be mad at someone who shows genuine kindness and concern. Share something you love about the person's child, curriculum, involvement in a project, etc.

Woven throughout this chapter is the importance of listening. Listening is as important as messaging in hard conversations. In fact, aim for 70% listening, 20% speaking, and 10% asking questions in a difficult conversation. Try using the prompts below to seek understanding of multiple perspectives, solve problems, and strengthen relationships.

- What's your take on...?
- How did you feel when...?
- I hear you saying...
- What outcome would you like to see?
- I can tell you care deeply about...
- What might... look like?
- How can I support you?
- Thank you for sharing

Chapter 9: Develop Your Network

The authors start this chapter with a wise warning: leadership can be extremely exhausting, stressful, and isolating to the point of burnout and despair. Don't try to do this work alone! They show you how to tap into the collective wisdom of the hundreds of thousands of education leaders near and far so you don't have to reinvent the wheel or be alone in your learning.

Which colleagues in your district are always down to collaborate and have fresh insights? Who can you text for help at the drop of a hat? Who do you respect and admire? Take a minute to list some educators in your district you can learn from and lean on.

Additionally, find connections in your local, state, and national networks, and foster them. The authors show how to develop a solid professional network in-person and digitally:

Where to Meet Others	<p>Local: workshops, conferences, virtual networking events, district events, district email listserv</p> <p>State: conferences or workshops at least a few times a year, virtual events when possible, state association events</p> <p>National: conferences, workshops, online events</p>
How to Engage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce yourself to district colleagues, start a Google doc with shared ideas, and create a monthly meeting. • Don't just sit with your team at conferences! Push yourself to talk to people outside your school/district—you never know who's facing similar challenges or who's willing to share resources. • Exchange business cards and emails. • Visit each others' buildings to get ideas. • Meet for lunch or dinner. • Volunteer to organize or present at conferences. • Travel to state and national conferences with local friends to share hotel costs and learn together. • Scan the room and approach someone you don't know. Make a quick introduction and ask the person about themselves. Ask them to share the most exciting thing or biggest challenge about their school.
Tips for Connecting Online:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sign up for interesting workshops. • Leave your camera on, focus, and ask questions. • Note which people have great ideas, and message them afterwards to complement them and start a relationship. • Seek out online offerings such as monthly Zoom calls about leading as women, distance learning, or other topics. • Use Twitter: follow leaders, comment on and share posts, message folks and make connections. Check out <i>140 Twitter Tips for Educators</i> if you're new to Twitter. • Attend book studies hosted by authors or publishers. • Check out NASSP's Town Hall or ASCD's virtual events.

There's an important to-do after you attend these events and meet these amazing new educators—**follow up**. Within the week, reach out to those you met. Make sure to introduce yourself again and mention something interesting you heard or shared. Shrug it off if they don't respond—just keep reaching out to other awesome leaders and you'll grow the right network.

Chapter 10: Commit to Your Learning

When it's 8pm and you haven't even left your office yet, personal and professional learning may not be the *first* thing on your mind. However, great leaders are those who find time for learning and growing. The authors advocate for Michael Simmons's "five-hour rule"—spend at least an hour a day learning or practicing a new skill if you want to be successful. Yep, 5 to 7 hours a week. You probably already have an hour in the bag just today. How long have you been reading this book summary? Did you read an article, blog, or book for 15 minutes? Listen to a podcast or webinar? Try a new idea at your morning meeting? Make a list of all of the ways you learn (articles, blogs, books, podcasts, webinars, etc.)

Consider how you can fit learning into your daily, weekly, or monthly schedule. Could you find a way to incorporate it into your morning or evening routine? Some ideas for learning include:

- Weekly newsletters
- Updates from bloggers/writers such as the Marshall Memo (or Jenn's monthly book summaries from THE MAIN IDEA!)
- Podcasts downloaded on your phone so you don't have to rely on internet coverage
- Keeping a book with you at all times—if we encourage our students to be readers, we must be readers ourselves.

As a way to keep her own professional learning front and center, co-author Kourtney emails a monthly instructional focus to all staff and includes articles, blog posts, or videos on the month's topic. This forces her to research articles and videos on each instructional focus topic such as: lesson design, metacognition, student talk vs. teacher talk, collaborative learning, and more.

Tips for making learning happen:

- Make sure your focus is on learning—don't try to multitask or have something going on in the background.
- Block time out on your calendar.
- Catch live events or follow their hashtags if you miss them.
- Learn with friends and colleagues as a way to make learning more powerful and impactful.
- Form summer reading groups with staff and families

Finally, the authors discuss how to focus when there are so many topics and materials competing for your attention. Prioritize learning in your weakest areas, skills you and your staff need to work on, and where you'd like to be next year, and in the future. For example, if you're hoping to move to a trimester system next year, start learning and planning now. If you'd like to have the position of district curriculum director in five years, start reading and practicing now.

Part Four: Care

Chapter 11: Find Your Balance

The authors warn, "If you're not careful, this job will eat you alive." The stress from the job impacts your sleep, diet, health, and time with friends and family. And they know this firsthand. Co-author Kourtney ended up going to a doctor for heart palpitations and also took a test to measure her stress hormones—not surprisingly, they were off the charts! Stress can get the best of you, *if* you allow it. But the good news is that you don't need to choose your job over your health – you can balance them both. Below are some ideas.

Schedule

Your schedule can have a huge impact on your well-being. When you wake up in the morning do you immediately grab your phone to see which teachers need a sub? Instead, the morning can be an incredibly grounding and productive time for you personally and professionally, so you might want to create a *different* morning routine. Hal Elrod in *The Miracle Morning* suggests you start the day with affirmations, visualization, exercise, reading, journaling, and silence. Consider creating a plan to wake up 30 minutes or an hour early to be sure to move your body and engage in activities that will start your day on the right foot. It's fine if you're not a morning person, the point is to intentionally create a schedule that works for you. Be sure to include blocks of time for family, exercising, and even checking emails (so you don't just check them all the time). The idea is to conquer your schedule so it doesn't conquer you!

Health

By now you know you need six to eight hours of sleep. To fall asleep more easily, try turning off electronics at least an hour before bed and charging your phone in another room. And as for eating, it makes all the difference to stay hydrated and eat healthy food. To help you, try carrying a water bottle with you to all of your meetings and keep healthy food within reach of your desk—washed fruit, vegetables, and small portions of almonds—as a way to prevent you from just grabbing the candy in the secretary's jar instead!

Relationships

Relationships are key to creating balance in your life. You might choose someone who can serve as an accountability partner to keep you on track with your commitment to remain balanced. Or you might simply surround yourself with nurturing personal and professional relationships that have a positive impact on you. Identify those people who believe in you and make you smile and be sure to nurture these relationships to help you balance work and life when things get crazy.

Be Present

Part of being present wherever you are involves turning off the electronics from time to time. This may mean disconnecting from screens each night, the weekend, and over vacations. And be sure to model this balance for your staff—if you are staying off screens after a certain hour, don't send them emails at that time, either! It is particularly important to leave screens behind so you can be present with the people in your life. Try some strategies to help you remain present—put your phone in a basket before dinner, write a sticky note for your laptop that says, “Be Present,” or find other ways to focus on the person who is in front of you.

Chapter 12: Show Gratitude and Grace

As a school leader you are going to face complaining teachers, yelling parents, and negative staff reactions to unpopular decisions. How are you supposed to lead through all of this with gratitude and grace?! The authors have experienced these challenges themselves and provide some useful strategies to help you show up with both gratitude and grace.

Gratitude

To develop your sense of gratitude it helps to start first thing in the morning. Using that vital quiet time to focus on gratitude goes a long way. For example, Rachael has a habit every day after her morning run to sit down with her coffee and write down 10 things she's thankful for and 5 notes of appreciation to others. Kate has a different approach to gratitude—she helps to build a mindset of appreciation *across her entire staff* by collecting notes of appreciation all week and then reading a few at the end of staff meetings.

Grace

When you focus on gratitude it becomes easier to lead with grace. Leading with grace is about how you *respond* to others. This means taking time to understand others and not reacting in the moment when you may not be your best self. Take some time to understand that people's actions are usually about *their own* internal struggles rather than you, and respond with grace.

It is also about giving grace to *yourself* when you stumble and make mistakes. Instead of beating yourself up, if you can see mistakes as opportunities to learn, this dovetails well with a growth mindset. Being able to share your vulnerability, admit when you are wrong, and say you are sorry is a great way to not only give yourself grace, but to model a growth mindset in action. It takes grace to realize when you are wrong and to respond appropriately.

To build your ability to respond with grace, you need to strengthen your resilience and perseverance. The way to do this is to actually grapple with adversity and reflect on how you've grown. Think about a recent tough situation and reflect on the following:

- How did you gather information to understand the situation?
- How did your response help or harm the situation?
- How did you rely on your mentors or network to address the situation?
- What part did you play in the situation?
- How did you take care of yourself after it concluded?

Conclusion: Lead with Love

Is there room in schools for both rigor *and* love? The authors answer with a resounding yes! They believe leaders can set high expectations for academics and behavior while still having fun and greeting the community with hugs and connection. This love can take a variety of forms from saying, “I love you” to high-fiving students in the hallways to giving a student extra tutoring. Or your love might come across by offering to cover a teacher's class so they can see their own child perform. Expressing love may make you feel vulnerable, but love is what makes people feel connected. And people who feel loved and appreciated go beyond expectations.

In one example, Rachael shares a time she was entering into a difficult conversation with a staff member and she was irritated that this staff member had blamed a student rather than take responsibility for the situation. She knew she might blow up so Rachael asked herself how could she enter the conversation *from a place of love*. When the meeting was about to start, she made sure her body language was open, she sat next to the staff member, and she affirmed the positive things the staff member was already doing. She reaffirmed her care and support for them and sat quietly as she gave the teacher a chance to share what had happened. She could easily have chosen the path of the jerky principal, but instead she conveyed a sense of care, support, and love. It is particularly important to respond with love during *tough* situations. Below are other examples of how to respond to difficult situations with love:

- Instead of using a sharp tone with a student who forgets how to enter school calmly, lovingly respond by reteaching him how.
- Instead of sending that scathing email to a parent about their child's disrespect, pause and ask questions out of curiosity.
- Instead of being furious that staff are arriving late to staff meetings, have a private check-in to find out why.

A Loving School Culture

Many of us have worked in schools where staff members pass each other in the hallways and don't even look up. It may sound odd, but to start to create a loving culture you may need to explicitly state that at this school staff make eye contact, smile, and at least say, “hello.” Small gestures like this go a long way in making people feel connected. Further, think about the space in the school – is it welcoming? Are signs inviting or do they say, “Don't do this”? Does your office smell like bleach or cinnamon? And how does your presence (or lack thereof) influence the school culture? Are you cheering kids on during a game of four-square and joining an English department while they plan lessons before school? Don't be that principal whose presence startles staff and students because they are so unaccustomed to seeing you around school! There are many ways to show your love and build a loving culture at your school.

THE MAIN IDEA's PD ideas for Strategies, Mindsets, and Practices for Excellent Leadership

Below are some activities you can do alone or with a leadership group to refine essential leadership skills. Each group of activities corresponds to one of the four pillars of leadership and the four parts of the book: REFLECT, FOCUS, CARE, and CONNECT.

I. REFLECT

A. REFLECT on school priorities

1. Spend 10 minutes writing down what you do *well* as a school leader. What do you love about this work? What seems effortless?
2. Next, list the challenges you're having—those frustrating issues that never seem to go away no matter what you do. These will become the challenges you choose to focus on this year.
3. Now, cross out any challenges you have no control over. Write the remaining challenges on sticky notes (one per sticky note). Look at these frustrations and organize them into *themes*. Now write each *theme* on a sticky note.
4. Now that you have several themes, you might want to bring in your leadership team or cabinet. As a team discuss how these various issues impact student achievement. Order the sticky notes with *themes* from those that have the most impact on student achievement to the least on a wall or table. Come to consensus on the top two or three your school should focus on this year.

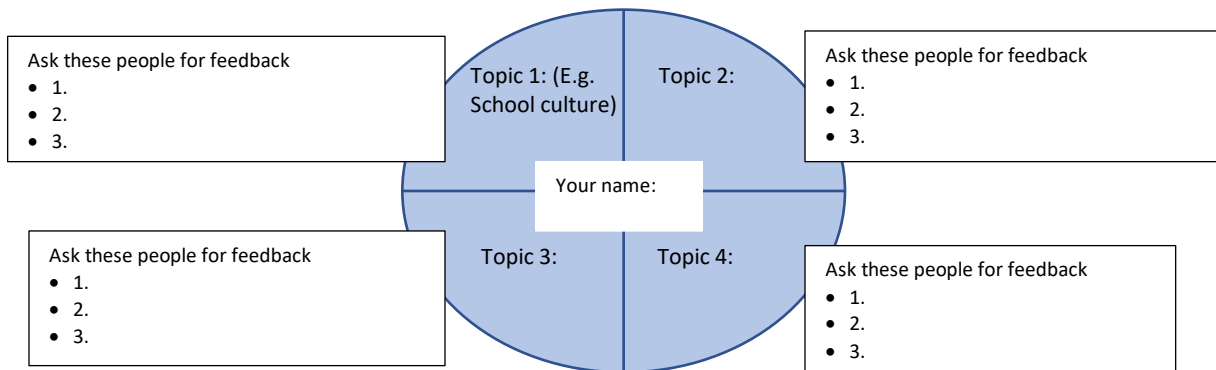
B. Seek out mentors to help you REFLECT

Enlisting mentors is a great way to reflect on your strengths and areas for growth. It helps to find different types of mentors: the **colleague-mentor**, **professional network mentor**, and **ugly cry mentor**. These mentors might be professional or personal contacts.

<p style="text-align: center;">Colleague-mentor</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Helps navigate the systems of your district</p> <p>Name 2-3 people you might reach out to:</p> <p>Next step (email, phone call, etc.):</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Professional network mentor</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Inspires you to see the big picture</p> <p>Name 2-3 people you might reach out to:</p> <p>Next step (email, phone call, etc.):</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Ugly cry mentor</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Has seen you at your worst, Yet still your biggest fan</p> <p>Name 2-3 people you might reach out to:</p> <p>Next step (email, phone call, etc.):</p>
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C. Solicit feedback to help you REFLECT

Feedback from colleagues will not just magically appear at your feet – you need to *seek it out*. The authors created a useful web to map out 4 topics you'd like feedback on and name specific individuals for that feedback. Topics might include the school culture, equity issues, professional learning, or really anything. Consider asking about the priorities you identified above. Fill it out now!



II. FOCUS

A. Return to your purpose

During this particularly turbulent time it is essential to remind yourself why you do the work you do. This will also help you FOCUS when too many competing tasks demand your attention in the coming months. Reflect on the following questions alone or with your leadership team:

- What compelled you to go into education?
- What still drives you to continue this work?
- Describe 2 moments from a typical day that make it crystal clear how meaningful this work is.
- What are some ways your passion comes out when you interact with staff and students?

B. FOCUS on 2-3 areas for improvement using a data deep-dive

What should you focus on *this year* for school improvement? How do you know whether to prioritize attendance, phonics, or behavior? There are hundreds of good ideas, but to really see improvement you should focus on just 2-3 for now. The authors suggest you examine *data*, *standards*, *strategies*, and *climate* to determine your priorities.

1. Divide up your leadership team and ask each person to gather some of the following data.

<i>Data</i>	<i>Standards</i>	<i>Strategies</i>	<i>Climate</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• State or district test scores (by groups such as grade level, gender, race, and classroom)• Classroom-based assessment data from two points in time (each teacher must collect data or be provided it from previous teachers)• Attendance data for various student groups• Behavior referral data for various student groups	<p>Determine if staff are using them by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Two-question survey:<ol style="list-style-type: none">1) Do you regularly use standards in planning?2) Which ones? Use Google Forms, Poll Everywhere, or Survey Monkey• Visit each teacher during a planning session and ask which standards the lesson or unit focuses on	<p>Ask staff to share their 3-5 most common strategies for engaging all students.</p> <p>This could be done through an online survey, a written shareout at a staff meeting, or individual walkthroughs.</p>	<p>Send out a survey asking “How does it feel at school?”</p> <p>Get qualitative and quantitative data by providing a space for written thoughts as well as a chance to rate school culture using a number (scale of 1 to 5).</p>

2. Using a jigsaw activity, have each member of the leadership team present the data they collected. Note that a data deep-dive may take several meetings. Consider dividing the leadership team into smaller groups to focus on areas of interest.

3. Based on the data shared, give each leader 5 sticky notes (virtual or real ones) to propose possible priorities for the year. Then do a gallery walk and give each person 8 votes (use check marks on the sticky notes). Either it will become clear with these votes which should be your school’s top 2-3 focus areas. If not, eliminate priority areas with the least votes and vote again.

III. CONNECT

Leaders have hundreds or thousands of interactions each day – nothing is more important than getting to know your people and how to productively interact with them!

A. Use student stories to learn about students

The authors suggest that all staff should get insight on every student in your building. First ask staff to spend a few minutes interviewing a few students each week by asking questions that illuminate who they are. Ask about their hopes and dreams, family traditions, favorite food, things they find difficult, and hobbies.

At the beginning of every staff meeting, have 2 staff members share about a student they interviewed that week. By hearing two student stories at every staff meeting, everyone can learn something new about students.

B. Practice hard conversations

Work with your leadership team to practice holding hard conversations with grace. Before you do this, print copies of the table in the chapter 8 summary that gives tips on navigating difficult conversations based on different reactions.

1. Ask each member of your leadership team to write one example of a difficult conversation (with staff, families, and students) on a slip of paper. For instance: addressing a staff member after you heard her repeat a harmful racial stereotype and she got defensive. Have each leader write several difficult scenarios and put the slips of paper into a jar.

2. Now ask each leader to draw out a few slips of paper and choose one for this exercise. Give each leader a printout of the chart with tips and have them take some time individually to review the chart and consider how they would respond to the scenario on their slip.

3. Given the comfort level of your staff, either have them role-play hard conversations or discuss what they might say in pairs. If they role play, each leader should take a turn initiating a conversation as a school leader while their partner responds in the role of the person the leader is addressing. Each partner should use their knowledge of similar situations, typical responses in their school communities, and incorporate ideas from the chart. After each conversation have the leaders give each other feedback.

IV. CARE

You may think that you're simply born knowing how to care for yourself and others. Actually, it's a skill you can learn. Below are some activities for you, as the leader, to develop skills in caring for yourself and others.

A. Map our your miracle morning

Hal Elrod, in his book *The Miracle Morning*, says you should maximize the productive time in the morning by engaging in affirmations, visualization, exercise, reading, journaling, and some silence. That might be *a lot* for a school leader, but you certainly can carve out time and space for activities you value and that will prepare you for the challenging day ahead.

1. List the *components* of *your* ideal morning (before you leave for work). Take a look at Hal's and then write your own list here:

2. Plan for the *time* you want to engage in these activities and map out a schedule (e.g., 5am: Wake up, 5:15-5:45am: Run, 5:45-6:00 Coffee and skim the paper, etc.)

Your miracle morning: _____

3. Now, set yourself up for success. Right after you finish reading this sentence, take any clothing or materials to reflect (journal, pen) out of the bedroom and set them up for easy access in the morning. Now, set *two alarms*: One to wake up and one to go to sleep (yes, if you want to wake up earlier for your miracle morning, you'll also need a reminder to get to bed earlier, too...)

B. Practice leading with grace and gratitude

1. Create a gratitude habit. Everyone loves to be appreciated and thanked, but in order to do it regularly, you need to develop a *habit*.

Remember Rachael has the habit of writing 10 things she's thankful for and 5 notes of appreciation with her coffee each morning. And Kate collects notes of appreciation from her staff and reads them at the end of staff meetings. Notice that both habits have the *time* for when the habit is to occur clearly marked out – while sipping coffee and at the weekly staff meeting.

Be sure to think about *when* you want your gratitude habit to occur and put it in your calendar after you write it below.

Outline *your* proposed gratitude habit and *when it will occur*: _____

2. To practice leading with grace, you need to reflect on how you responded to previous tough situations and how you might do better *next* time. Use these questions from the authors to reflect on a tough situation and think about what you might do differently:

- How did you gather information to understand the situation?
- How did your response help or harm the situation?
- How did you rely on your mentors or network to address the situation?
- What part did you play in the situation?
- How did you take care of yourself after it concluded?

C. Reflect on leading with love

From reading this book, it's quite clear that these three authors lead with love. Not only do their schools benefit from this, but they do, too.

Take a moment to think about how infusing a situation with love might change the outcome. Think back to a difficult situation you experienced at school (giving a teacher difficult feedback, responding to a yelling parent, etc.) Reflect (in writing or in your head) on how you might you have approached it with love. Now think: how might the incident have taken a different course and how might the outcome have differed?

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