

Preface

This book introduces the science of social networks applied specifically to K–12 schools. The importance of networks for schools and educational leadership is significant. This book does not claim to offer all the answers. It does, however, provide school leaders with a tool or map to understand—and eventually change—their schools’ protocols and profiles. Reform efforts, policies, and small-scale change tactics fail for a variety of reasons. For example, a new program might flop because important influential people in a school or district have not bought in. Their informal clout can kill an initiative even before it becomes visible. Or a small structural change may be doomed because the “word” communicated among staff is uneven and disjointed. But, the science of social networks provides a template for school leaders and reformers to think more organically about top-down implementation approaches. Most people concerned with the improvement of schools have moved past the debate between top-down and bottom-up change. The truth is neither approach is guaranteed to work. A balance of both comes closer. The science of social networks helps us see why, and it gives us tools to be more creative about cultivating innovative ideas, reviving school cultures, enhancing teacher capacity, and managing conflict—in short, making schools more attractive and fulfilling places to work.

WHAT'S IN A SONG?

A good book tells a story. If successful, the gist of the entire thesis lingers long after the book is finished and put away. Expressive word forms, such as metaphors or lyrics, have the propensity to stick in the memory bank to be summoned when needed. Think about a song you heard twenty years ago. You're listening to your car radio one day driving to work and all the memories from that time period swirl in your head and heart calling forth detailed images of your thoughts and emotions at the time. The song might even provide a clue on how to deal with an existing, vexing problem.

In their book, *Made to Stick*, the Heath brothers (2007) compare flaccid, fleeting ideas with those that stay with us and influence our thinking and behavior. Abstract information, for example, typically comes and goes without a residual trace. Yet, proverbs such as the Golden Rule hang on forever with an enduring impact on our thinking, if not our behavior. Subway's claim of "Seven subs under six grams of fat" lacks glue. But the story of Jared Fogle, who once tipped the scales at 425 pounds, becoming a svelte shadow of his former self by eating a foot-long veggie sub for lunch and a six-inch turkey sub for dinner caught on. It anchored Subway's claim and continues to pump up the company's bottom line.

Heath and Heath identify six earmarks of adhering images: (1) They are simple; (2) they are unexpected, spawning interest and curiosity; (3) they are concrete, loaded with sensory images and picture words; (4) they are credible, imbued with face validity; (5) they touch our emotions, causing us to feel something; and (6) the chief medium is stories, narratives that create mental movies.

All this provides the background for our selection of a metaphor or storyline to anchor the ideas in this book. As the three of us were absorbed in the concept of networks, a song came to mind. It's an oldie that some of our younger readers may not recognize. No problem. It's the lyrics that tell the

story. A flight of imagination sees a new principal standing in front of the Green Door. She wants in to learn the secrets of the school, but she doesn't have the secret code. She can hear people inside and wants to be part of the action. But she's alone, out in the cold and out of the loop. As principal, on the outside of that door, she is not sure how to be the leader she intended to be. Over time, however, she learns that the key to the Green Door comes from understanding the social landscape of the many adults who work in the school: the social networks of the faculty and staff. With this knowledge, the principal learns to speak a new language, one tailored to the unique culture that is her new school.

Read the lyrics. Better yet, listen to the song. It will draw you into the message of the book. And you'll remember and hopefully apply the lessons. It's our "superglue" approach to the principalship . . . all wrapped in a song.

GREEN DOOR

Midnight, one more night without sleepin'
Watchin' till the mornin' comes creepin'
Green door, what's that secret you're keepin'

There's an old piano
And they play it hot behind the green door
Don't know what they're doin'
But they laugh a lot behind the green door
Wish they'd let me in
So I could find out what's behind the green door

Knocked once, tried to tell them I'd been there
Door slammed, hospitality's thin there
Wonder just what's goin' on in there

Saw an eyeball peepin'
Through a smoky cloud behind the green door
When I said Joe sent me
Someone laughed out loud behind the green door
All I want to do is join the happy crowd behind the
green door

Reprise

The Green Door. Words and Music by Bob Davie and Marvin Moore
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