

Preface

WHAT THIS BOOK IS ABOUT AND WHO SHOULD READ IT

I have been a student of leadership and, more particularly, instructional leadership since the late seventies. Unfortunately, many of the stakeholders in public education have not always shared my enthusiasm regarding its importance. They often seemed oblivious to what is a given in my mind: without an effective principal, forget about having an effective school. Instead, resources across the United States were directed to tests, teachers, and textbooks in an effort to improve student achievement. Standards received far more attention than school leadership, as if a list of outcomes could impact a school without a strong leader at the helm. The debate regarding how best to certify teachers got more press than the critical shortage of outstanding principals. More recently, however, politicians, parents, and even the press are finally giving principals their due. With this renewed interest in and emphasis on the importance of strong instructional leadership in achieving accountable and effective schools, a second edition of *Seven Steps to Effective Instructional Leadership* is timely.

In the fall of 1983, I was hired as the principal of an elementary school in the far western suburbs of Chicago. It was my first principalship, and I was armed with five dress-for-success suits, a newly acquired doctoral degree, and all the answers. Confronted with a student body that was over one third poor and 40 percent minority, standardized achievement test scores that hovered at the 20th percentile, and a staff that seemed powerless in the face of such odds, I discovered that my answers were for a totally different set of questions than those I faced.

I began to search for alternative answers and found them in both expected (the research literature) and unexpected (the collective wisdom of the faculty) places. Research in the early eighties was increasingly demonstrating the impact of building the principal's leadership. But the challenge for me was how to translate that

xii • Steps to Effective Instructional Leadership

research into action in my own school. I did not have years of experience upon which to draw, and I did not have unlimited staff development funds to train teachers and import new programs. But in my ignorance, I did not realize my limitations. I only knew what I wanted my school to become. That is always the challenge for the principal—how to create a worthy vision and how to motivate and inspire a disparate group of students, teachers, and parents toward that vision. I found that through shared decision making, instructional support and encouragement, and the partnership of businesses in our community, the faculty was energized and empowered. Together we discovered that “the wizard was truly within us.”

In the 8 years I served as the principal of that building, student achievement rose dramatically, parental involvement as measured by PTA membership and financial support tripled, and our image in the community turned around. Teachers participated in planning and decision making through a building-leadership team. The faculty came to view their principal as a leader rather than a manager. Decisions were no longer made unilaterally; teachers participated in decision making and were held accountable. Rather than following recipes and rules that were no longer working, we hypothesized, solved problems, and tested new ideas. Teaching was focused on the outcomes we developed together rather than on covering textbooks, and expectations moved from a belief that some can learn to the belief that all can learn. During my 8-year tenure at Lincoln School, I became a student of the instructional leadership literature and dedicated myself to becoming an instructional leader. I constantly monitored and evaluated my own behaviors, and I asked my faculty to share their observations and suggestions with me, both informally and with standardized instruments. In 1989, I was privileged to be named an Instructional Leader by the Illinois Principals Association, and in 1991, I was honored to be named the National Distinguished Principal from Illinois. Above all else, these experiences were humbling since they put me in touch with dozens of exemplary instructional leaders around my state and the country whose accomplishments at leading schools to excellence were awe inspiring. Many of their reflections on instructional leadership are included in the chapters that follow.

I believe that any dedicated educator has the capability to become an exemplary instructional leader. All that one needs is a willingness to learn accompanied by the commitment to follow through in day-to-day behavior. The seven steps to effective instructional leadership that you will read about in the following chapters have been tested by practitioners and

validated by research. Adopted, practiced, and refined in your own professional life, they will make a measurable difference in the lives of students, teachers, and parents in your educational community. You will discover that the wizard is truly within you.

WHOM THIS BOOK IS FOR

I have written *Seven Steps to Effective Instructional Leadership* for results-oriented administrators who daily face the pressures of accountability. Effective schools with high-achieving students don't just happen. They are cultivated and thrive under the strong instructional leadership of principals who daily engage in each of the seven steps.

This book is designed for educators in a variety of positions: (a) current school principals who want to renew and revitalize their approach to leadership; (b) prospective principals who need to know how and where to channel their energies in preparing for the principalship; (c) central office administrators who need a template to assist in the hiring, coaching, and evaluation of principals; and (d) university professors who train and mentor current and prospective principals.

OVERVIEW OF THE CONTENTS

The Introduction sets forth the differences between leadership and instructional leadership and defines the critical attributes of effective instructional leadership. Chapters 1 through 7 describe each of the seven steps in detail, set forth explicit behavioral indicators related to each step that will enable you to evaluate yourself and solicit feedback from the teachers with whom you work, and offer practical suggestions from actual principals regarding how they have implemented the seven steps. The book concludes with some immediate things you can do to become an effective instructional leader, a complete Instructional Leadership Checklist, and reproducible response form.

This updated edition of *Seven Steps to Effective Instructional Leadership* contains substantial changes:

- A revision of step one to include standards-based reform, the use of data to drive school improvement, and the necessity for effective instructional leaders to achieve results with their teachers and students
- The addition of personal expectations to step five
- A substantial revision of the Instructional Leadership Checklist along with the inclusion of several new indicators

xiv • Steps to Effective Instructional Leadership

- An easier-to-use response form that now groups the indicators with their respective steps to effective instructional leadership
- A collection of must-read books to help you extend your learning regarding the seven steps
- Updated references and research
- New vignettes from both elementary and secondary instructional leaders that illustrate how to implement the seven steps to achieve results.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I remain indebted to the following individuals who made contributions to the first edition of *Seven Steps to Effective Instructional Leadership*. Many of them have moved from the principalship into central office administration, university teaching, and consulting positions, but they continue to share their instructional leadership expertise with a new generation of both prospective and practicing principals.

To the following instructional leaders who completed lengthy questionnaires or were interviewed or contributed ideas for the first edition, my special thanks. Their insights have enriched my own professional life as well as the pages of this book: Harvey Alvy, Carol Auer, Chuck Baker, James A. Blockinger, Diane Borgman, Dave Burton, Nancy C. Carbone, Amelia Cartrett, Gary Catalani, Maryanne Friend, Nick Friend, Christine Gaylord, Linda Hanson, Robert V. Hassan, Carolyn Hood, Alan Jones, Michael L. Klopfenstein, Brent J. McArdle, Roger Moore, Stella Loeb-Munson, Linda Murphy, Phyllis O'Connell, Ann Parker, Michael Pettibone, Joe Porto, Richard Seyler, Danny Shaw, James D. Shifflet, James J. Simmons, Lynn Sprick, Frances Starks, Merry Gayle Wade, Sister Catherine Wingert, and Paul C. Zaander.

I owe my great and good friend, Don Chase, former field representative for the Illinois Principals Association (IPA), a debt of gratitude for the many opportunities he afforded me to share my ideas with others and grow as an instructional leader. The ink was scarcely dry on my contract when Don was at my door recruiting me to join IPA. It was one of the best decisions I ever made.

The teachers at Lincoln School, West Chicago, Illinois, from 1983 to 1991, taught me most of what I know about instructional leadership. They were unfailingly forthright, longsuffering beyond belief, and showed me on a daily basis that all children *could* learn.

To my former colleague and friend Phyllis O'Connell, who now teaches at North Central College (Illinois), I appreciate her right-brained

reading of this manuscript and her extraordinarily creative approach to instructional leadership. Her suggestions and critique were invaluable. Other colleagues who read the manuscript of the first edition and offered assistance were Becky Rosenthal, Tom Giles, John Patterson, and Nancy Coughlin.

My former superintendent John Henning first believed in my abilities, gave me the freedom to grow and change as a person, and enabled me to become an instructional leader. I have learned much from his wise counsel and his example as a leader.

To my late husband, Richard, whose encouragement to write this book did not die when he did, I am grateful.

My final tribute I reserve for my husband and business partner, E. Raymond Adkins, whose love, warmth, patience, gentle spirit, and unerring eye for detail have seen this book from its beginning to the final form.

Two individuals convinced me of the need for a second edition of *Seven Steps to Effective Instructional Leadership* and thoughtfully shared exactly what needed to be added to the book to make it more timely and applicable to both prospective and practicing administrators. Both of these gifted teachers have used the first edition as a textbook in their graduate courses on the principalship and know its contents as well or better than the author: ElizaBeth McCay, assistant professor of educational administration at Virginia Commonwealth University, and Roland Smith, long-time school superintendent and currently professor of educational administration at the University of Arkansas, Fayetteville.

A special thanks to Sandra Ahola, Kathie Dobberteen, Alan Jones, and Yvonne Peck for sharing their expertise with the readers of this second edition. Alan contributed to the first edition, but he is still going strong—eloquent and thought provoking as always. Kathie attended one of my first raising-reading-achievement workshops and went back to her building to turn it upside down with her zeal for making sure that no child left her school without knowing how to read and write on grade level. I have worked with Sandra's staff to improve reading achievement in her K-8 school and have experienced firsthand her effective instructional leadership at work. I first met Yvonne at one of my workshops and was immediately impressed with her passion for achieving results at the high school level. As an assistant principal at this level, she knows the challenge of being an instructional leader in a school of 3,000 students while sitting in the second chair. She always has time for my questions in spite of the demands on her time.

Writing books is often a lonely endeavor, and a phrase from that old cowboy song "Home on the Range" could well be paraphrased to describe

xvi • Steps to Effective Instructional Leadership

the life of an author: “Where seldom is heard an *encouraging* word” My special thanks to Roland Smith for sending me the following *encouraging* words taken from an answer to a comprehensive examination question written by one of his students. These words, above all else, convinced me to write the second edition of *Seven Steps to Effective Instructional Leadership*:

The fourth priority I would attempt to accomplish in my first year [as a principal] would be to continually practice the seven steps for effective instructional leadership as set out in Elaine McEwan’s book of the same title. No other work has influenced the formation of my philosophy more. [The seven steps have] provided me [with] a roadmap for developing what I hope is an effective educational administrative philosophy.