



From Leading to Succeeding: The Seven Elements of Effective Leadership in Education

By Douglas Reeves (Solution Tree Press, 2016)

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

The main ideas of the book:

- ~ This book presents seven essential elements of leadership that, according to research, lead to improved student performance.
- ~ The seven elements are: purpose, trust, focus, leverage, feedback, change, and sustainability.

Why I chose this book:

This book synthesizes the research about leadership both in the field of education and beyond. While there is a dizzying number of books on leadership (Reeves writes that Amazon has over 115,000 books on the topic), what is important isn't what's new, but what we've learned over time. Reeves helps by distilling that research so we can focus on the seven essential elements of effective leadership.

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

✓ Why each of the seven elements is essential to successful school leadership:

1. *Purpose:* Only by infusing an organization with a clear, passionate, and succinct purpose can leaders get everyone on board and head in the right direction.
2. *Trust:* Without trust, leaders simply will not be able to collaborate with staff to successfully implement needed changes.
3. *Focus:* Research shows that leaders who know how to prioritize their efforts by focusing on fewer initiatives have significantly higher gains in student achievement.
4. *Leverage:* Just about every instructional strategy seems to work in some way. However, effective leaders know how to identify those strategies that have the highest impact on student achievement.
5. *Feedback:* Feedback has the potential to lead to significant improvements in teaching and leading.
6. *Change:* It is vital that leaders learn to manage the change process effectively; to do so, it requires that educators acknowledge that present practices are not working.
7. *Sustainability:* Effective leaders think beyond their own tenure and plan for the long-term success of their schools.

Introduction

Effective leadership is rare. However, it *is* possible. This book presents seven elements of leadership that are linked—based on an international body of evidence—to improved student performance. However, you can't simply develop two or three of them. To be effective, you need to enact all seven of them. An overview of these seven elements is below:

1. *Purpose*: It's much easier to forgive a leader's mistakes if that leader has a clear purpose. However, to truly infuse the organization with a clear goal, the leader must also have a *passion* for that purpose.
2. *Trust*: Leaders need to build trust by following through on their words with consistent actions. Effective leaders must build trust quickly and must acknowledge when he or she makes a mistake.
3. *Focus*: Research shows that schools with fewer initiatives have significantly higher gains in student achievement. Yet the vast majority of schools create plans with dozens of priorities. School and district leaders need to address this fragmentation and focus on the best initiatives.
4. *Leverage*: If you look at the research on educational strategies, just about *everything* works. However, the effective leader prioritizes those strategies that are the highest-leverage, that is, have the largest impact on student achievement.
5. *Feedback*: This is a particularly high-leverage strategy. Instead of immediate and specific feedback, we use complicated evaluation systems and simply don't coach as well as we could. Leaders must not only give effective feedback but must also devise methods for receiving it as well.
6. *Change*: Change is required to implement just about anything; leaders must weigh the costs and benefits of change. Before making important changes, leaders must gain buy-in from the entire staff.
7. *Sustainability*: The most effective leaders are known for not just what they do on the job, but for what lasts after they leave.

The seven elements above are based on research of the best 21st century leadership practices as well as the classic literature on leadership from all fields, not just education. However, it is important that leaders engage in *all* seven elements. If they neglect even one, there will be a significant decrease in effectiveness. Furthermore, in addition to outlining what school leaders *should* do, the book also clarifies the practices leaders should *avoid*. For example, if you want to develop focus, you need to be sure to eliminate fragmentation. What follows is one chapter on each of the seven elements introduced here.

Chapter 1 – PURPOSE

In most schools, the purpose is expressed through the mission and vision statements. However, there are several problems with relying on these documents to express the school's fundamental purpose. The first is that they don't fully capture the answer to the questions: "Why are we here, and what makes us come to school every day?" and "What exactly are we *passionate* about that gets us up out of bed?" While your school may aim for a five percent increase in test scores, we are more likely to be passionate about saving lives and improving the futures of our students. The focus on a score isn't likely to provide the emotional enticement that lights a fire under the educators and members in the community.

In addition to being compelling, the purpose needs to be clear. However, the mission and vision statements – the tools for capturing our purpose – are rarely clear and concise. Hardly ever does a strategic plan (which contains the mission and vision) even fit on a single page. An example of one exception is the school district in Freeport, Illinois. They kept their strategic plan to one page by focusing on only four areas: student performance, human resources, partnerships, and equity. However, most strategic plans are much longer because leaders want the creation of these documents to be inclusive. These documents are filled with dozens of good ideas and initiatives without anyone taking a stand to say that honestly, we only have the resources to focus on a fraction of the plans here. One study of high-performing organizations found the following about their mission and vision statements:

- The best mission statements are clear, memorable, and concise.
- The average length for the top fifty organizations is only 15.3 words.
- The average length for the top twenty organizations is only 9.5 words.
- The shortest contain only two words.
- The longest contains 235 words.

Examples of the best mission statements include:

- TED—Spreading ideas
- The Humane Society—Celebrating animals, controlling cruelty
- USO—Lifting the spirits of America's troops and their families

These examples show that we *can* express our passion and purpose in just a few words. Compare these three short examples with a more traditional mission statement that is well-intentioned, but too wordy to be clear, remembered, or easily translated into the daily activities of staff:

Mission: The focus of the educational process should be on student learning and raising the expectations and standards of academic achievement for all students. Our curriculum and instruction should give students the opportunity to reach their full potential and personal goals, provide for their individual differences and interests, and guide them in selecting meaningful academic and career choices. Technology is essential for the preparation of lifelong learners as students move into a globally connected society. The district should provide an excellent faculty, administration, and support staff who utilize the resources of the community to fulfill its vision. The district shares accountability of an excellent education with students, parents, and the community to seek educational excellence. The district should provide facilities that are designed to enhance the educational process.

A shorter mission can be compelling and capture the essence of the institution. For example, the mission of the Santa Fe Community College is: “Empower Students, Strengthen Community.” Whenever a new initiative arises, it can be tested with a simple two-question litmus test: “Does it empower students?” “Does it strengthen community?” Another example of a concise mission statement is, “Everyone learns every day.” When we have a clearer, more concise mission, we are more likely to be able to develop and implement plans that support that mission. Instead, we have far too many schools with large gaps between their aspirations and what is happening at the school day to day. We can see this in the increased dissatisfaction among teachers (one study reports teacher satisfaction has dropped to 23 percent) as well as the disturbingly high disengagement of students.

Another cause of the gap between a school’s purpose and its day-to-day realities is that we often unwittingly embrace *opposing* purposes. For example, we say we value the judgment of teachers, but then we measure the school’s reading goals solely with standardized tests. To avoid this conflict, we must not only state what we *will do* in our priorities, but we should consider adding the following words as well, “Therefore, we will *not*...” Below are a few examples:

“We are committed to teacher collaboration, therefore, we will *not* implement other initiatives during our PLC time.”

“We are committed to success in literacy, therefore, we will *not* implement additional programs that take time away from reading and writing.”

“We are committed to fostering a creative environment for students and teachers, therefore we will *not* implement grading and evaluation systems that punish experimentation and error.”

If after reading this chapter you cannot state your school or district’s mission and vision then this is a good place to start. Begin by creating concise statements that clearly communicate your purpose and passion.

Chapter 2 – TRUST

Leaders will make mistakes, but if their colleagues trust them, they can be forgiven. Without trust, leaders simply cannot collaborate with staff to implement successful changes. The most fundamental way to build trust is to follow through on what you say you will do. If you promise to give teachers time to learn new standards and create new assessments, you cannot fill up that time with useless staff meetings. If you promise to provide teachers with the opportunity to visit each other’s classes, you cannot cut the substitute teacher budget unless you plan to cover those teachers’ classes yourself.

In addition to being true to your word, there are ways we undermine trust systematically by promoting the wrong drivers of reform. As Fullan argues, the following undermine teachers’ trust:

- Focusing on rewards and punishments rather than capacity building
- Promoting individual rather than group success
- Investing in technology over quality instruction
- Providing fragmented solutions rather than integrated and coherent ones

So, where to begin? Leaders can begin with building personal trustworthiness. Below are three ways leaders do this: (1) do what they say they will do; (2) acknowledge mistakes quickly and openly; and (3) confront conflicts between personal values and the professional work environment.

1) *Do What They Say They Will Do*

All leaders say they care about individual students, but what do their actions reveal? Principals who are true to their word know the names of every single student in the building, not just those who end up in their office frequently. System leaders should also make it a priority to know the staff and students in the system. One superintendent who won the Broad Prize required some of his central office staff to spend a minimum of 70 percent of their time in schools! One superintendent even put himself on the substitute teacher list to ensure that he spent time interacting directly with students.

2) *Acknowledge Mistakes Quickly and Openly*

Leaders don’t need to be perfect to build trust. However, they do need to admit and learn from their mistakes. Historically, when asked to name their mistakes (such as in a job interview), leaders would offer the glib response, “I work too hard” or “I care too much.” These do not reveal honest errors, nor do they show the leader has learned anything from them. In contrast, one way to structure a more genuine and useful reaction to mistakes was coined by Richard Elmore in his book, *I Used to Think... and Now I Think...* Take a look at the examples below:

“I used to think I could complete the school budget on my own, but under a tight deadline I neglected to have it reviewed by a colleague and ended up making several significant errors that almost cost our school several staff positions. Now, even if I think a document is complete, I always have it proofread by a colleague.”

“When I saw a student smoking marijuana outside of a classroom, I grabbed the drugs and started screaming at him rather than following our protocol for dealing with this type of incident and including our trained security team. The student dropped out shortly after this incident. Now I’ve learned I need to stop and think through my reaction so I follow the school’s protocol and ensure the proper disciplinary action rather than reacting without thinking.”

Some of the mistakes school leaders make have dire consequences, but the difference between an inexcusable failure and a “learning failure” is the leader’s honesty about the mistake and willingness to learn from it. Furthermore, when leaders openly speak about their mistakes it sets the tone for the entire school or district.

3. Confront Conflicts Between Personal Values and the Professional Environment

Many leaders avoid conflict and boast of having a conflict-free environment in their schools. However, this is a common leadership trap – when conflicts are not addressed publicly, they end up coming out in the school parking lot, local restaurants, and other places outside of school. Resentment builds when staff hear leaders espouse certain values but then tolerate it when certain members of the community violate these values. It is not easy to do, but a key job of the leader is to acknowledge and address conflict. In addition, leaders can address conflict more successfully if they have already built trust. It is easier to confront people with whom you have already built trust rather than those with whom you only have a confrontational past. This is why, from day one, leaders should assume that teachers want to do a good job and are worthy of trust.

Chapter 3 – FOCUS

Just as ignoring our mistakes is an impediment to effective leadership, pursuing *too many ideas*—no matter how well meaning—is another roadblock to success. However, in order to prevent this, leaders need to decide not only which initiatives to focus on, but also what to discard. If you look at the calendars of many school leaders, it is clear that they are pursuing too many goals. Instead, leaders need to develop what Reeves calls “calendar integrity” —their use of time should reflect their highest priorities. This is not easy to do. As research in over two thousand schools has shown, only four percent of high-poverty schools exemplified high levels of focus and only two percent with large numbers of English learners did. Why is focus so hard to attain? First of all, focused leaders are dull. It is a lot less thrilling to have a long-term focus and aim for sustainability rather than glom on to the latest and hottest initiatives. And when the newest initiative doesn’t show promise in the short run we abandon it even though the greatest gains in achievement occur after several years of deep implementation. This is why leaders often take on and then abandon initiatives leaving their staff with initiative fatigue.

<i>Why focused leaders are so rare ...</i>	
Focused Leaders	Fragmented Leaders
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are relentless • Require accountability • Pursue sustainable practices • Are dull 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Show enthusiasm for every new initiative that gains popularity despite evidence of impact • Are too busy pushing tomorrow’s initiative to follow through on yesterday’s • Chase initiatives with illusory claims • Are glamorous

How to Focus on the Best Initiatives

Even when district leadership has a clear idea of just a few, focused priorities, this doesn’t always translate into schools and classrooms. In one large urban school system where Reeves worked, the district had outlined only six initiatives, but principals and teachers identified 88! The problem is that with each passing year, nothing had been dropped, and new initiatives had been piled on. No one had gone through the practice of stating, “We will do... and therefore, we will *not* do...” as was introduced in the first chapter. This section is about identifying those practices schools should and should no longer implement.

First, leaders need to get beyond the binary notion that either “we did it” or “we didn’t do it” about implementing initiatives. Just because a school receives resources and training does not necessarily mean that implementation has occurred. There are degrees of implementation. For example, DuFour and colleagues came up with an implementation rubric for understanding the extent to which one particular initiative—PLCs—have been implemented in a school. Reeves also created a three-level implementation rubric that he has used in over two thousand schools. Below is an excerpt of what an example of this rubric looks like for the initiative: *leadership goal setting* with regard to how specific a goal is (the first letter of the acronym SMART):

Exemplary: All goals specify targeted student groups, grade level, standard or content area, and subskills. Leaders specify assessments to address subgroup needs.
Proficient: More than one goal specifies targeted student groups, grade level, and standard or content area, with subskills delineated in that content area. Leaders specify assessment to address subgroup needs.
Needs Improvement: Most goals describe general rather than specific targeted student groups, grade level, and standard or content area, with subskills delineated in that content area.

Having a way to determine both the level of implementation of an initiative (above) along with its impact on student achievement is the best way to determine how to prioritize initiatives. To do this, below is a chart with four quadrants of leadership actions to help you evaluate the effectiveness of different initiatives:

High Impact	LEAD	INVEST
Low Impact	WEED	EVALUATE
	Low Implementation	High Implementation

A. Weed—This lower left quadrant includes those initiatives that have low impact and have not been implemented deeply. These are the well-intentioned initiatives that should have been discarded long ago, but which may have a few champions. This is an easy one. These initiatives should be weeded out.

B. Evaluate—The initiatives that go in the lower-right corner are those that have been deeply implemented and yet yield few positive results for students. These are the exciting new initiatives—like those that involve technology—but which may not clearly impact teaching or learning. Another possibility is that the instrument being used to evaluate these initiatives may be inappropriate. For example, if there is a new dual-language program that aims to improve math instruction but then math proficiency is only tested in English, this may not adequately assess how well the new program is functioning. The programs in this quadrant should be adjusted, adapted, and carefully evaluated.

C. Lead—This is a tough quadrant. This covers those initiatives that are high impact, but not thoroughly implemented. There are several strategies that the research shows have a strong impact on student achievement, but which still have not caught on in many schools. These include examples such as formative assessment strategies and nonfiction writing. The good news is that it’s not time to search for more initiatives, instead, it is time for strong leadership to lead the way to more effective and deeper implementation.

D. Invest—Obviously, leaders should continue to invest in those practices that are deeply implemented and have a high impact on student achievement. In addition, leaders must go further to determine ways to ensure that these practices continue to spread and improve.

Simply listing all of your current initiatives is an important first step—knowing which initiatives you have is vital in choosing the best ones. Next, creating *implementation rubrics* like the ones DuFour and Reeves have designed is also a key step in the process. Finally, examining where each initiative falls on the chart of leadership actions above will help you make important leadership decisions about what stays, and what must go. It is only by going through a systematic and rigorous process of self-examination that leaders will be able to successfully weed their education garden. As Reeves writes, “Weeds do not need analyses, lectures, or strategic plans. They need to be pulled out by the roots and discarded.” (p. 47) It is time to weed your education garden. Clear out everything that is irrelevant, from classroom materials to agenda items to programs that produce few results. Time is too scarce a resource for educators to spend it on things that don’t matter. Have the courage to weed the garden, stop the fragmentation, and focus on those priorities that have the greatest impact on the students.

Chapter 4 – LEVERAGE

A small lever can move a lot. As leaders, we need to think about how we can maximize leverage—that is, get the greatest result for the least amount of input. As outlined in the previous chapter, many programs and initiatives have our attention, but which ones have the greatest impact on educational results? How do we identify which ones have the most leverage?

First, we are asking the wrong question. It’s not enough to ask, “What works?” For example, the U.S. Department of Education’s What Works Clearinghouse (<http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc>) houses research-based practices that work in schools. While the programs that appear here are screened to help schools focus on what is most effective, there are still far too many initiatives to implement deeply. Almost anyone selling any program can show that it works. What schools need to do is to replace the question, “What works?” with “What works best for the students in our school?”

John Hattie argues that you don't need to be a researcher to determine if a program works well in your school. You can simply create a spreadsheet with columns for the students' names, test results before trying a new teaching strategy, and test results after the implementation. Spreadsheets can automatically compute an effect size for the results (Excel has an Effect Size command – see this video explanation to learn how: <https://vimeo.com/57012651>) You can always opt to do this by hand (see the instructions in John Hattie's *Visible Learning for Teachers*). By understanding the impact of programs and strategies you implement, you can eliminate those that have persistently low effect sizes to allow more time for those that yield higher results.

In this chapter, Reeves introduces three high leverage approaches that have a strong research base: (1) nonfiction writing, (2) professional learning communities, and (3) the use of feedback. However, the success of any initiative depends on the quality and degree of implementation at a particular school. In addition to looking at effect sizes, school leaders should examine a wide range of evidence to see if an initiative is working: classroom observations, case studies, analyses of many studies, etc. A thorough examination will help leaders draw their own conclusions about whether strategies have a high enough impact to be considered high-leverage.

In fact, it may be easiest to begin by eliminating those approaches with the lowest or even counterproductive impact on student achievement. Below are a few places to start:

- Throw out any initiatives that fit under the 'Weed' section of the chart that was introduced in the previous chapter. These include initiatives that have low implementation and low impact.
- Discontinue meetings that primarily serve to disseminate information. There are plenty of other more efficient ways to share information from email and social media to methods of sharing video announcements (like voxer.com).
- Eliminate units that do not focus on essential knowledge and skills. This means teachers must work together to come to consensus in deciding what constitutes essential learning.
- Eliminate any data entry that could be completed by noncertified staff.
- Eliminate teaching observations that are not immediately followed up with feedback aimed to improve teaching.

With effort, it is possible to identify those initiatives and strategies that have the most leverage and focus more deeply on those.

Chapter 5 – FEEDBACK

The previous chapter described feedback as a particularly high-leverage strategy to improve student achievement. Feedback has the same potential to lead to significant improvements in teaching and leadership, however, only if implemented effectively. Humans actually crave feedback about how to improve, and if we deliver the right kind of feedback, we can help. This means our feedback must be FAST—fair, accurate, specific, and timely.

Fair: Think about children playing games in the playground. When the rules are clear and everyone knows them, the game is fun. When rules change and are unclear, the game results in conflict. The same is true for teaching or leadership. People feel they are judged fairly when there is consistency—that is, when a large percentage of those who evaluate them (usually 80 percent), come to the same conclusions. For classrooms and schools, this happens when evaluation rubrics are crystal clear and result in consistent judgments.

Accurate: To be accurate, when we evaluate a student's mathematics skills, we must evaluate only that student's mathematics skills. This sounds straightforward, but in reality we often include extraneous elements in our students' grades – from participation and attendance to homework completion. The same is true for teacher evaluation. We often include many factors when evaluating a teacher, such as lesson plan format and meeting attendance, when the only question we should focus on is "Did the students learn as a result of this teacher's instruction?"

Specific: The best evaluation rubrics are specific. For example, see Kim Marshall's teacher evaluation rubrics (www.MarshallMemo.com) and Reeves's leadership performance rubrics (go.SolutionTree.com/leadership) Because these rubrics are so precise, they have two benefits. First, regardless of who uses the tool to examine teacher or leader performance, the conclusions are remarkably similar. In addition, because the details describe each level of performance, teachers have a built-in road map showing them exactly what they need to do next to improve rather than simply learning what they did wrong or receiving generic praise.

Timely: Olympic officials don't share their scores a week after the competition. In schools, the same must happen with feedback. For it to have the greatest impact, it must be delivered as soon as possible, preferably immediately. For example, teachers should deliver feedback during class. After an observation, school leaders should deliver feedback during the very next break or at least that same day. It would behoove administrators to collect feedback at the end of a meeting so they can see immediately if the meeting met its objectives. Administrators can even collect this timely feedback in the form of exit tickets the same way teachers use exit tickets with students. Or they can use a rubric like the one below (excerpted from pp.73–74).

Rubric to Evaluate Leadership of Meetings

Not meeting standards:

- Is leader focused with little deliberation
- Allows discussion to be monopolized by a few people
- Does not provide an agenda
- Blames students or parents rather than taking ownership of problems and does not empower teachers to make a difference in learning

Progressing:

- Allows meeting to stray from the agenda
- Does not encourage more than a few people to contribute to discussions of teaching and learning
- Uses some review of student work as evidence for discussions of teaching and learning
- Establishes norms but does not enforce them

Proficient:

- Asks follow-up questions
- Shares instructional strategies
- Examines data and its connection to professional practices
- Establishes and enforces norms, especially participation by all
- Conducts evidence-based discussions to determine what adults can do to improve teaching and learning
- Distributes leadership
- Uses a clear agenda with a shared understanding of expectations

When Feedback Goes Wrong

In contrast to giving feedback that is fair, accurate, specific, and timely, sometimes leaders get feedback wrong. Getting feedback wrong may mean that it is unfair, inaccurate, vague, or postponed. In the same way leaders can use a tool like the rubric above to determine the effectiveness of their skills in running a meeting, they can use the rubric below to examine the feedback they give to colleagues.

Rubric to Evaluate the Quality of a School Leader’s FEEDBACK

Exemplary: The feedback focuses entirely on what was observed—the actual professional practices, not intentions. The content of the feedback is specific enough that other observers would come to similar conclusions.

Proficient: Feedback is fair, accurate, specific, and timely. It follows state and district requirements. While there is some informal feedback, it primarily complies with the evaluation system.

Progressing: Feedback is rare, and when it is given, it is vague and inconsistent. Generic comments such as “Good job!” are used, therefore lacking the guidance teachers and leaders need to improve and having little impact on performance. Evaluations come without discussion and are often a surprise, leading to conflict.

Not meeting standards: Evaluations are grossly unfair and vastly differ depending on who is giving them. Feedback is so vague that teachers have no idea how to improve and performance has not improved over the past few years. Evaluations are only given at the end of the year so teachers have no opportunity to use the feedback to improve.

Overall, people truly thrive on feedback as long as it meets the criteria laid out in this chapter. We need to help people move beyond the idea that feedback must be uncomfortable and evaluative and actually use it to improve and change. This, of course, depends on people’s willingness to change—which leads us into the next chapter.

Chapter 6 – CHANGE

Change in education occurs all the time. In the last ten years, we’ve seen new national policies that affect everything from curriculum and assessment to teacher evaluation. However, the problem is that education leaders don’t adequately assess whether we are ready for those changes. This chapter addresses change readiness by providing more information about change and tools to assess readiness.

Costs and Benefits of Change

The first step in approaching any type of change—whether it’s a systemic change or a change that affects a small group—is to determine the costs and benefits. To truly understand these competing issues, the leader needs to be committed to hearing different viewpoints. Sometimes leaders convene meetings to discuss changes with the sole purpose of seeking buy-in for what they have already decided. While those leaders might leave the meeting convinced of their superior persuasive abilities, the rest of the group will resent not being heard. Remember Stephen Covey’s famous words, “Seek first to understand, then to be understood.” To help a group deliberate about the merits of proposed changes, below is a useful chart to put those changes into four categories.

Many Benefits	HEROES	INVESTMENTS
Few Benefits	EASY CUTS	TURKEYS
	Low Cost	High Cost

Easy Cuts—The changes that are low cost and low benefit are easy to toss. These may be what resulted from changes made long ago that just aren't producing results now, so they can be easily tossed out.

Turkeys—You would think that high-cost, low-benefit programs would be easy to eliminate, but expensive initiatives often have vocal proponents. These proponents might be a vendor, a member of the board, or a senior leader. An example of a change that might fit in this category is fancy technology that students end up using mostly for information retrieval rather than collaboration, creating models, and exploration, as had been intended. Still, these changes are often vociferously supported. As Reeves writes, “Every turkey has a champion.” (p.81) The leader needs to make it clear when initiatives fall into the Turkey quadrant.

Heroes—It might seem clear that low-cost, high-benefit approaches should be the changes most in demand. For example, the following three changes cost almost nothing and yet yield important changes: (1) modifying the grading system so it is fairer, (2) making homework more meaningful, and (3) improving the effectiveness of meetings. However, these types of changes may involve loss and can seem controversial. Even still, it is worth considering these changes in light of the fact that they are inexpensive and have a significant impact.

Investments—Oddly, rather than easily supporting the initiatives in the Heroes quadrant (low cost, high benefit), people seem to prefer those in the Investment quadrant (high cost, high benefit). These are the technology initiatives, for example, that actually do raise student performance.

Change Readiness Assessments

In addition to using the chart above to assess the costs and benefits of different changes, leaders also can help facilitate change by assessing the degree of readiness for systemic change and personal change. Former superintendent Mike Wasta developed a tool, excerpted below (from pp.83–84), for leaders to determine how ready the organization and the leader are for significant change. This chart helps leaders look at three changes from the past few years to determine readiness of five factors—(1) planning, (2) sense of urgency, (3) stakeholder support, (4) leadership focus, and (5) impact on results. Then leaders can use these results in planning for new change efforts.

	Change 1 (Rate 0 to 10)	Change 2 (Rate 0 to 10)	Change 3 (Rate 0 to 10)
Planning: The plan was clear, detailed, and effectively communicated.			
Sense of Urgency: There was a widespread sense of the need for change.			
Stakeholder Support: All stakeholders understood and supported the change.			
Leadership Focus: Senior leadership made the change a top priority long after initiation.			
Impact on Results: The change had a measurable and significant impact on results.			

The next tool (p. 85) is useful in determining the personal changes people have made over the past few years. Notice that the categories are analogous (planning, sense of urgency, etc.)

	Change 1 (Rate 0 to 10)	Change 2 (Rate 0 to 10)	Change 3 (Rate 0 to 10)
Planning: I planned in advance the steps I would take and knew clearly how to make the change.			
Sense of Urgency: I knew the price of failing was greater than the price of changing.			
Personal Support: My family/friends knew about the change and supported me.			
Personal Focus: I devoted time to initiating and maintaining the change.			
Impact on Results: I can measure the results, and they are clear and significant.			

Leaders can use the results from their own personal history of change and the history of organizational change readiness to predict how successful a new change effort will be. They can put the results of these two tools together in a Change Readiness Matrix below (p. 87), to see if the new change is likely to result in resistance, frustration, learning, or change.

High readiness for personal change	READY FOR LEARNING	READY FOR CHANGE
Low readiness for personal change	READY FOR RESISTANCE	READY FOR FRUSTRATION
	Low readiness for organizational change	High readiness for organizational change

Ready for Resistance: If neither the leader nor the organization has a history of successful change, newly imposed changes from outside will most likely be met with resistance, anger, or outright avoidance of the initiative.

Ready for Frustration: If the organization is ready but the leader is reluctant, frustration results. If every time new initiatives are introduced the senior leadership refuses to engage, eventually the organization takes no more risks and stagnates.

Ready for Learning: This is typical of a new leader who comes in ready for change (history of a high degree of personal readiness for change) but finds an organization unprepared for change. This means the leader must first address the learning needs of the organization—the planning and communicating that must occur before any change can take place successfully.

Ready for Change: The upper right quadrant is the ideal place for change; both the leader and the organization have a solid history of enacting successful change. They understand what is involved in creating change and have the experience to do so.

Common Myths About Change

In attempting to create change, it is important to keep in mind that there are a number of commonly held myths about change that need to be debunked. For example, “Systematic change takes five to seven years.” While some initiatives do take longer, some do not need this much time. One school in Iowa designated a certain room where students could catch up with their work after school each Friday, and within a single year they saw a 90 percent decrease in student failure.

Another example is, “Before making important changes, it is imperative to gain buy-in from the entire staff.” This is one of the most damaging myths about change leadership. Consider what happens when leaders expect full buy-in. First, if leaders have complete buy-in, then the change must not be very significant. Second, if leaders wait for complete buy-in, they will never be able to implement the change. It is true that leaders can make most of their decisions through consensus and listening, but there are examples when leaders need to make a tough call. Think about the important decisions to drop corporal punishment or initiate desegregation. These and other myths can cloud a leader’s effort at initiating important change efforts.

The final key element for leaders is to be able to sustain those efforts over the long haul (the subject of the next chapter).

Chapter 7 – SUSTAINABILITY

While the word *sustainability* may make us think about caring for the environment so it thrives for generations to come, the concept is equally applied to education. Leaders need to think about what they can do today to ensure that students and schools will benefit even after they have retired. Unfortunately, as Hargreaves, Boyle, and Harris report, “Sustainability is often an afterthought of organizational change.” (p.97) So what can a leader do now to ensure that changes being put into place will remain for a long time? There are three simple things a leader can do. First, tell the truth. Always follow through and do what you say you will do, and don’t do something you don’t believe in. It sends a strong message when leaders refuse to do things that run counter to their values. Second, always focus on top priorities. The goal is focus, not fragmentation. And third, deal honestly with people even when it isn’t pretty. When it is time for praise, don’t hold back. Praise from leaders is powerful and is felt deeply by staff.

When every U.S. president has left office, he has written a letter to his successor. Consider writing your own letter to your successor, but don’t wait until you are leaving. Sit down now and write a letter with your hopes and dreams (and even your fears). Such a letter can be useful in guiding both you and your successors for years to come.

THE MAIN IDEA's Professional Learning Suggestions for *From Leading to Succeeding*

While this book is short (exactly 100 pages), the ideas in it are big. Consider finding other leaders who want to improve their leadership capabilities and discuss each of the leadership elements introduced in the book. Below are a few exercises you can do on your own, with a leadership team at your own school, or with colleagues who are also school leaders.

Chapter 1: Purpose

⇒ [Shorten your mission](#)

Mission statements take a long time to create, and your school or district probably already has one. Rather than bringing together all stakeholders to create a new one, try to shorten your existing one. Keep in mind that high-performing organizations often have very short statements. Examples of the best mission statements include:

TED: Spreading ideas

The Humane Society: Celebrating animals, controlling cruelty

USO: Lifting the spirits of America's troops and their families

⇒ [Check if your recent initiatives pass the mission litmus test](#)

Once you have created a short mission statement, turn it into a few questions that can be used to test whether programs or initiatives at your school follow the mission. For example, the mission of the Santa Fe Community College is: Empower Students, Strengthen Community so they can ask the following about any initiative: Does it empower students? Does it strengthen community? Examine a few recent initiatives that you have implemented to see whether they pass the litmus test using your own questions. Once you do this, you can use these questions to assess whether *new* initiatives should be started at your school.

Chapter 2: Trust

⇒ [Admit a recent mistake](#)

Trust is the foundation for everything you do and it takes a great deal of effort to develop it. Below is just one approach you can try to build trust. Think back to one or several mistakes you've made recently and craft *and deliver to staff* your own *I Used to Think...and Now I Think* statements. These are the examples from the chapter that can help guide you:

"I used to think I could complete the school budget on my own, but under a tight deadline I neglected to have it reviewed by a colleague and ended up making several significant errors that almost cost our school several staff positions. Now, even if I think a document is complete, I always have it proofread by a colleague."

"When I saw a student smoking marijuana outside of a classroom, I grabbed the drugs and started screaming at him rather than following our protocol for dealing with this type of incident and including our trained security team. The student dropped out shortly after this incident. Now I've learned I need to stop and think through my reaction so I follow the school's protocol and ensure the proper disciplinary action rather than reacting without thinking."

Chapter 3: Focus

⇒ [Develop an implementation rubric](#)

Whenever you begin to implement a new initiative, it is helpful to determine how thoroughly the staff is implementing it. What may look like the failure of a new effort may turn out to be a lack of full implementation. To assess this, you can design an *implementation rubric*. This doesn't need to be complicated. Simply outline what 'needs improvement,' 'proficient,' and 'exemplary' implementation would look like. Try this right now for a recent initiative at your school/district:

Exemplary:
Proficient:
Needs Improvement:

⇒ [Determine your next leadership move for a few existing initiatives](#)

What should be your next leadership move for the initiatives at your school? Which initiatives should you invest in, re-evaluate, discard? Reeves developed a matrix (below) to help you make these decisions. Choose a few programs or practices to examine. First, design an *implementation rubric* for each one (see the preceding activity). Next, map each one onto the matrix below. For example, if two teachers began drastically increasing the amount of time they spend teaching nonfiction reading, put this on the matrix so you will know what next steps to take as a leader. See if you can identify one practice/initiative/program you could give up right now and one practice you would like to implement more fully across your school/district.

High Impact	LEAD	INVEST
Low Impact	WEED	EVALUATE
	Low Implementation	High Implementation

Chapter 4: Leverage

⇒ [Learn to calculate effect size and determine which approaches work best for your students](#)

Most strategies we implement in schools have *some* effect on student achievement. Rather than simply accepting all strategies with *any* positive effect, we need to focus our efforts on those strategies that have the *most* effect. As John Hattie argues, it's vital to “know thy impact.” Hattie also says that to determine how much a strategy impacts student achievement, you don't need to be a researcher.

First, learn to calculate effect size for *one* initiative or program at your school. Simply create a spreadsheet with columns for the students' names, test results before trying a new teaching strategy, and test results after the implementation. Spreadsheets can automatically compute an effect size for the results. Learn how with this video explanation: <https://vimeo.com/57012651>. Or if you prefer, you can do this by hand (see the instructions in John Hattie's *Visible Learning for Teachers*). Once you learn how to calculate effect size, plan to do this for a few teaching strategies after which you can conduct discussions with teachers about dropping one or two of the least effective ones. Better yet, make it a habit to regularly check effect sizes to assess the impact of teaching strategies.

Chapter 5: Feedback

⇒ [Solicit feedback](#)

As Douglas Stone and Sheila Heen write in *Thanks for the Feedback*, “Nothing affects the learning culture of an organization more than the skill with which its executive team receives feedback.” The first step in skillfully receiving feedback is to *solicit* it. After the next meeting you run, consider distributing the rubric below and asking your colleagues for feedback. If this proves useful, consider creating other rubrics to ask colleagues for feedback on other aspects of your leadership.

Rubric to Evaluate Leadership of Meetings		
Not meeting standards		
• Leader-focused, little deliberation	• Allows discussion to be monopolized by a few people	• Does not provide an agenda
• Blames students or parents rather than taking ownership of problems and does not empower teachers to make a difference in learning		
Progressing		
• Allows meeting to stray from the agenda	• Does not encourage more than a few people to contribute to discussions of teaching and learning	
• Establishes norms but does not enforce them		• Uses some review of student work as evidence for discussions of teaching and learning
Proficient		
• Asks follow-up questions	• Examines data and its connection to professional practices	
• Shares instructional strategies	• Establishes and enforces norms, especially participation by all	
• Distributes leadership	• Uses a clear agenda with a shared understanding of expectations	
• Conducts evidence-based discussions to determine what adults can do to improve teaching and learning		

Chapter 6: Change

⇒ [Assess change readiness for one new initiative from the past year](#)

To prepare for the next new initiative that comes to your school, examine how ready your school was for the *last* initiative. Think about one new change effort from the past year, and rate how ready both the school and you were for this initiative below. Then discuss these results with a leadership team to predict and plan for a more successful implementation of a change effort coming up.

Readiness for <i>systemic change and personal change</i>	Systemic Readiness (Rate 0 to 10)	Personal Readiness (Rate 0 to 10)
Planning: The plan was clear, detailed, and effectively communicated. I planned in advance the steps I would take and knew clearly how to make the change.		
Sense of Urgency: There was a widespread sense of the need for change. I knew the price of failing was greater than the price of changing.		
Stakeholder/Personal Support: All stakeholders understood and supported the change. My family/friends knew about the change and supported me.		
Leadership Focus: Senior leadership made the change a top priority long after initiation. I devoted time to initiating and maintaining the change.		
Impact on Results: The change had a measurable and significant impact on results. I can measure the results, and they are clear and significant.		

Chapter 7: Sustainability

⇒ [Write a letter to your successor now \(even if you have no plans to leave!\)](#)

Many leaders make the mistake of thinking about issues of sustainability once they plan to leave. Take a moment to write a letter to your successor now. Consider addressing the six other elements as a way to structure your letter. What is the school's purpose? What are the most successful ways you've found to develop trust? How do you help the school remain focused and which initiatives are the school's top priorities? Which are the highest leverage approaches? How is feedback addressed at the school? What might the next leader do to help sustain the most important initiatives at the school?