

HAVE THE COURAGE TO ADDRESS PROBLEMS DIRECTLY

I once had a colleague who told me about a problem that was vexing him at his school—a certain fifth-grade teacher who arrived to school late on a not infrequent basis. At our next meeting, I asked him if he had gained any traction on his problem. He replied that he had. In response to my inquiry, he informed me that he had sent a memo to all teachers about district policy about when teachers were to be at school and in their rooms at the start of the school day. What he told me was this: Rather than having the courage to talk to this single teacher whose behavior was inappropriate, he angered the entire rest of the faculty who were already doing the right thing. Not a wise piece of leadership.

TALK LESS

Most leaders talk too much in public meetings—and in private exchanges for that matter too. It is a bad habit that routinely dampens conversation and debate. Practice not saying anything for the first third of meetings. Pick your points of entry carefully.

MOST BARRIERS ARE SURMOUNTABLE

In the process of improvement, it is almost inevitable that significant barriers will arise. Ninety-five percent of us arrive at these seemingly insurmountable difficulties, acknowledge the impossibility of further movement, and turn back. Great leaders learn to dig trenches under barriers and find ladders to use to climb over them.

STRUCTURAL CHANGES DO NOT PREDICT SUCCESS

Principals and other school leaders are trained to solve problems and improve schools by identifying and importing structural changes to their schools—block schedules, ungraded classes, detracking, and so forth. This is problematic. The first iron law of school improvement is that structural changes never have predicted, do not now predict, and never will predict organizational success.

IT REALLY IS ALL ABOUT THE KIDS

It may seem trite to say it, but this lesson is often honored more in the breach than in practice. Keeping kids first does not negate the significance of others—but it does put things in the right order.



“This book captures all the lessons I have learned about educational leadership over the years in a simple and clear way. I have a principal on an improvement plan now, and it could have been written from this book. This truly helps me know I am on the right track.”

Christopher Shaffer, Director, High School Campus
Springfield High School, OH

LET OTHERS WIN

Leaders often develop the bad habit of assuming that they need to win every skirmish, debate, point of contention, and so forth—what we call the Ty Cobb syndrome. It is not necessary and is generally tiresome. Get into the habit of letting others win.