

# *Preface*

The 1990s was a dismal decade for the principalship. Expectations for schools piled up, policies became more prescriptive but lacked coherence, implementation strategies were neglected, leadership training and development were missing, and few noticed the looming exodus of principals through normal and early retirements. Above all, the principalship was becoming increasingly unattractive, even to, or one could say especially to, those who wanted to make a difference.

Under these changing conditions, the advice I gave in *What's Worth Fighting for in the Principalship* no longer seemed adequate (Fullan, 1997). *What's Worth Fighting For* was commissioned by the elementary school teachers' union (at that time, principals were members of the union). They asked me to write a book that would help principals cope more effectively in situations of multiple demands. Their charge was an odd one for an academic: They requested a book that (a) was deep in insights, (b) contained plenty of action guidelines, and (c) was concise. This started a style of writing that attempted simultaneously to get below the surface into the more powerful conceptions, while making the ideas accessible and actionable. The 10 guidelines for actions were:

1. Avoid if-only statements, externalizing the blame, and other forms of wishful thinking.
2. Start small, think big. Don't overplan or overmanage.
3. Focus on fundamentals: curriculum, instruction, assessment, and professional culture.
4. Practice fearlessness and other forms of risk taking.
5. Embrace diversity and resistance while empowering others.
6. Build a vision in relation to both goals and change processes.

7. Decide what you are *not* going to do.
8. Build allies.
9. Know when to be cautious.
10. Give up the search for the “silver bullet.” (Fullan, 1997)

These ideas are still helpful but not up to the challenge of today’s principalship. They were written to provide school leaders with a mind and action set that more or less assumed that on any given day the larger system may not know what it is doing. Perhaps this latter situation still prevails, but it is no longer acceptable or doable to expect great leaders to evolve in numbers in organizations that do not cultivate them.

It has become clear over the past decade that we need large-scale, sustainable reform and improvement. To achieve this, we must now work on the question, “What would the system look like if it did know what it is doing?” (Fullan, 2003; see also Fullan, 1993, 1999, 2001a, 2001b). I am talking about system transformation. This book is about how principals and other school leaders must become agents and beneficiaries of the processes of getting there. This represents a huge start-up problem because current strategies, even the seemingly most effective ones, as I later show, do not produce school leaders who are pivotal to system change.

Chapter 1 sets the stage by showing why changing the context is the main agenda. I make the case that if we don’t focus directly on changing the conditions that surround us—the culture of the school, how one school relates to another, the school district’s role, and so on—we will not be able to pursue moral purpose on any scale. I also contend that this goal may not be as insurmountable as it appears. Small changes in context can be leveraged to make breakthrough changes.

Chapter 2 identifies barriers to the current principalship that indicate that we have a long way to go, although the claim in later chapters is that we can make substantial progress by taking up certain policy directions.

The third chapter introduces the idea of four levels of moral purpose, going from the individual through the school and district to societal levels. Chapter 3 focuses on the first two levels by staying at the level of the individual school and community.

Chapter 4 encompasses the system as a whole, including the district and the state. The question still is what is the moral

imperative of the principal in relation to these higher levels? The answer, in general, is that changes in the principalship are central to the task of transforming the system as a whole—that is, to generating and sustaining moral purpose across all schools.

The final chapter pursues the complexities of traveling the pathways of creating new roles for principals—one set focusing on what individuals can and should do; the other focusing on what changes are needed at the system level.

The net result is that the principal's role figures more prominently at both the school and the broader levels. My goal is to make the principalship more exciting and doable. It cannot require superwomen and supermen or moral martyrs because, if it does, we will never get the numbers necessary to make a system difference.

This book is about school leadership, with the principal or head of the school as the focal point. As I shall show, the principal with a moral imperative can help realize it only by developing leadership in others. It is the combined forces of shared leadership that makes a difference. School leadership is a collective enterprise.

The audience for this book is twofold: First, this book is for principals and all school leaders who want to make a bigger difference than they ever imagined they could; second, it is for leaders at all levels, including policymakers, who are in a position to alter the system, thereby creating conditions for transforming the principalship into a powerful force for reform.

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A special thanks to the thousands of school leaders we work with in our management-of-change training across several countries: Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, and several others. Much of what I have learned is embedded in our interaction.



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And finally to my many coworkers, academic colleagues, policymakers, and practitioners: Leading and learning always go hand in hand. I have been blessed with working firsthand with great lead learners.

