# Introduction

Imagine we're on a hilltop looking down below where it's the first day of school for a hundred schools. Thousands of children gleefully skip to school anticipating great things. A little boy walks hand-in-hand with his younger sister and his mother as if they are going to a celebration. Kids line up in front of the school "Welcome" sign for another scrapbook moment. Pictures are taken and texted to grandparents.

An older girl weaves her bike around students, bursting with desire to see her friends and review their summer fun. Every view is filled with another story, and everyone has a story. The atmosphere is enchanting. We can relate to the excitement as we are reminded of our own first days of school.

School is the best of times. So many new things to learn. So many ideas to explore. So much to discover. The promise in children's faces is delightful. The sun comes from behind the mountains, and the light paints all that potential in hope. A group of caring, conscientious principals, teachers, and staff await, eager to shape the future. The scene fills us with conviction.

For some, school is the worst of times. Some of that pure, lovely innocence is masked by anxiety, by fear, and by the realization that those promises might never be a reality for them. A few people can do so much harm. That pain fills us with conviction.

This book is our effort to close that gap. You all have work to do. In some cases, the work we are going to talk about should have been done already. We aren't asking you to try something experimental. We are asking you to dive into work that is essential to build a culture, focus your energies, and drive change in the right things for the right reasons. We invite you to look at a world you know too well—the world of Fake Work—and we hope you will see the world you need for a more successful future—the world of Real Work.

**School is the best of times.** So many new things to learn. So many ideas to explore. So much to discover. The promise in every child's face is delightful.

For some, **school is the worst of times.** Some of that pure, lovely innocence is masked by anxiety, by fear, and by the realization that those promises might never be a reality for them.

We hear, over and over again, that Fake Work is infecting your districts and schools and the other institutions and other organizations diverting educators from focusing on the Real Work of learning. We're here to assure you that there is hope by applying a better way of working, planning, and collaborating. Here you'll find the steps to building a high-performance culture focused on student success.

## It's All About Student Success

We (Gaylan and Betty) have a deep and abiding belief in education and believe that learning is the path to freedom, to civility, and to the growth of a society. We hold that belief for all learners: children, adolescents, on-the-job students, and adults. Student success is the top priority in all of the work that we do.

We care immensely about educators and education. We believe that educators are remarkably caring, dedicated, and even sacrificial, and they deserve to be valued, loved, and respected. No society thrives without education as its backbone. When we talk about educators, we mean the many different people who serve in educational organizations, from administrators to teachers to board members to leaders. We mean educators in our school systems, but also in business and government where educators are also critical to building high-performance cultures and developing people to serve the bigger needs of society.

We know this huge group of educators are the foundation to our civilization as a whole, yet are under-appreciated and patronized rather than honored with fair pay and fair credit for their value. Having worked with hundreds of educators in many capacities, we are moved by the selflessness and sacrifice they make in spite of low pay, long hours, and increasing demands. The current culture is quickly driving out committed teachers. That has to stop. We can't build sustainable cultures with the teacher turnover we are currently experiencing.

Students confirm our feelings. Just ask students if they believe teachers are important to their learning, and you will hear a resounding "Yes."

## This Book Is About Real Work

Despite the title, this book is not about Fake Work; it is about Real Work—valued, important, critical work. Fake Work is the analytical lens we use to discuss the problem. Fake Work explains a unique pathology about how Real Work is missed, overlooked, and misunderstood. Our goal is to evaluate issues that impede Real Work, and ultimately we

hope to show our readers how to be more effective and how to create new paths to achieving extraordinary results for their students.

Everyone knows someone who is lazy and who doesn't really care. But in our experience educators are amazingly hardworking, dedicated people. We know people work hard—but we also know that people do not always work purposefully.

The truth is that organizations are plagued—not by lazy people or procrastinators—but by hardworking people too often working against the most important needs of the organization—too often unaware of those real needs. These issues create sinkholes where value is degraded, where not all students realize success, and where morale is suffering.

Ultimately, the simple answer is to **rethink the work you are doing**.

- Does it enhance learning or diminish it?
- What would enhance learning?
- What barriers could we remove?

When individuals, teams, and organizations focus on how to do Real Work, we see astonishing opportunities for change and growth.

> Organizations are plagued—not by lazy people or procrastinators—but by hardworking people too often working against the most important needs of the organization—too often unaware of those real needs.

Figure 0.1, the Transformational Design Model, is an essential metaphor for this book. You will see it again and again. It acts as a guide to organize our thinking and the processes we use to change organizations and create success. Culture, along with the three focal points of strategy, alignment, and execution, represent a chain of events that guide organizational success.

**Figure 0.1    The Transformational Design Model: An Essential Process for Systemic Change**
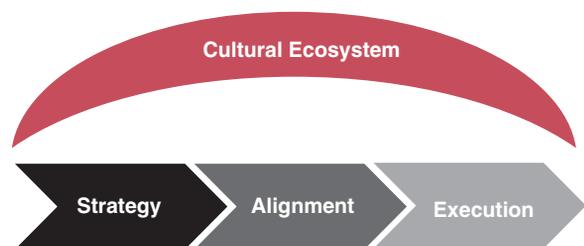


That success is dependent on those four interwoven factors:

### Culture

1. Develops and defines leadership to serve the best interests of your vision.
2. Creates and nurtures values and the behaviors that support those values.
3. Communicates and shares information.
4. Cultivates teams.
5. Facilitates Real Work.

### Strategy

6.  Defines and articulates organizational objectives or goals.

7.  Creates strategies that discriminately drive work to achieve those goals.

### Alignment

8.  Brings teams together to build a cohesive force with a common focus on strategies.

9.  Translates strategies into Real Work—the priorities of daily work.

### Execution

10. Acts on the priorities and takes responsibility for team and individual success.

11. Monitors and reports on Real Work to ensure accountability and to adjust to the realities of work.

**Figure 0.2   Hierarchy of Strategic Logic**
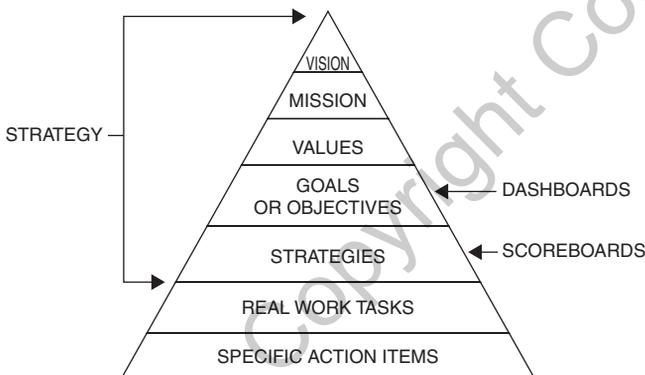


Ultimately, we are trying to ensure that all daily work is strategically connected. Figure 0.2, Hierarchy of Strategic Logic, is another key model that shows the language of strategic planning. We address this in detail in Section II, in the Prologue, and throughout the Paths to Real Work.

Strategy defines the goals, and execution defines the daily work—the actions that every individual must do to achieve those goals. So every action item in every person's Real Work plan—their personal priorities—should have a direct link, a line-of-sight to the top—the highest intentions of the organization. That's Real Work. In the strategic plan, every strategy should link to objectives and every objective should link to the mission and vision.

We have found that 50 percent of all work is Fake Work (Peterson & Nielson, 2009). As we began to do research, we made this very important discovery: Much of the hard work people do for their organization has little to do with the strategies of their organization. Lots of the work people do may seem necessary, and is often time-consuming and

## Fake Work

Work that is not directly linked to the strategic intent of an organization. Fake Work is work disconnected from our common purpose, wastes time and energy, and fractures our promise to serve the highest needs of our educational institutions. Educators cannot afford to do Fake Work. They have neither the time nor the energy to dedicate to work that isn't focused on strategic intent.

difficult to complete, but is not strategically important and therefore should not be consuming precious time and energy.

## We Use Real Educators' Stories

In the last few years, as we have shared the concept of Fake Work with others, we have been inundated with stories. Whether during conferences or in small groups, people line up to tell us their personal Fake Work stories and the serious problems Fake Work is causing in their organizations. We have been surprised—over and over again—at how forthcoming people are about the plague of Fake Work. We have included those stories in this book.

These stories come from our work, our colleagues, our clients, our friends. The complexities of systems, teams, and people come to life in these stories.

The stories are universal. If you work in a school or district, chances are your own experiences will resonate with those you read here. Many of the stories deal with the failings and frustrations of people, teams, and institutions. You will find many of the stories in Section II of the book. They can be frustrating because they are stories about real people caught in the web of Fake Work.

We felt it was best to maintain the anonymity of the schools and people that the stories involve. We have used pseudonyms for almost all of them. We have changed gender, ethnicity, and other factors. Names of schools have also been changed so they can't be recognized. We've learned that many people think it's about them, and our answer is: "It could be." But not you and not your school, just the possibility of being in the same situations.

In a few cases, like those involving Dr. Duron, Dr. Hernandez, and Dr. Reina, actual people are referred to and discussed. These are from people we know, requested information from, or interviewed.

Not all of the stories are about what's not working! In the Paths to Real Work, you will find inspiring stories where leaders and teams have learned from their mistakes and made changes that improved their school culture and the effectiveness of their work.

In this Introduction we begin with the "Journey From a 'D' School to a Blue Ribbon School" story because it frames the essence of the whole book. We like this story because it illustrates the work a school can and must do to create a high-performance culture. Further, this journey feels like the goal of education: to face the truth, to assess your strengths and weaknesses, to make a plan to change, and to make changes that get results.

"Journey From a D School to a Blue Ribbon School" was composed with the immense help of Laura Reina, vice principal of Edith Bowen Laboratory School (EBLS), a K–5 charter school located on the campus of Utah State University, in Logan, Utah. Acceptance to the school is determined through a lottery, a process that ensures that the population of the school is culturally, socially, and economically diverse. The school is a Title I school with 356 students: 35% of whom are eligible for free or reduced lunch and 15%–20% of whom are minorities. In addition, 16% of the students at the school qualify for and receive special education services (Reina & Stewart, 2019, p. 6).

## JOURNEY FROM A "D" SCHOOL TO A BLUE RIBBON SCHOOL

In the report *Our EBLS Journey: Making Change* (Reina, 2015) as well as their article in the *Journal of School Leadership*, Laura Reina and Courtney Stewart (2019) recount the powerful story of success of Edith Bowen Laboratory School from a D-rated school to an A-rated Blue Ribbon school. What follows are some excerpts from the report and the article as well as elaborations from Vice Principal Laura Reina.

"In 2011, as the new core was officially adopted [in Utah], the school struggled, along with many within the state, to implement the core with fidelity. A new assessment system was put in place to measure instruction regarding the new curriculum, and schools were graded for the first time.

"School grades were determined by looking at various aspects of achievement data, attendance, and overall performance. In the initial year of grading, [EBLS] received a 'D' grade. The following year it was a 'C' and then the next 2 years the school had an 'A' with continual

growth in all areas. In 2016, the school was awarded a National Blue Ribbon and named a top charter school in the state and nation.

"In 2011, just prior to the 'D' grade, a new principal was named" (Reina & Stewart, 2019, p. 6).

In 2013, between the two school years, teacher turnover was 16 percent and went to 26 percent the following year. These were indicators of change, but also dysfunction.

"At the beginning of the 2011–2012 school year, a new administrator was hired [Mr. Phillips, a pseudonym]. He had a wealth of experience, over 40 years in education, and, having been an assistant superintendent, understood schools at all levels. He was informed of the trials the school had faced and knew that he had financial, personnel, and academic issues that needed resolution. His approach to this situation was not one of force or power; instead, he was quiet, patient, and supportive" (Reina & Stewart, 2019, p. 12).

I remember many different things he said, like "I always think it's about the people, and your relationship with them."

Some weren't patient with his "go slow" approach. However, he worked on building relationships with every faculty member and wanted to learn what was happening from their perspective. Others just wanted the toxic staff let go.

Mr. Phillips's goal was to make systemic changes. It started with an evaluation of the school as a professional learning community (PLC), "which helped to shape the systematic plan for executing change. The plan came to be known as the 'journey plan' and was described by teachers as 'here's where we were trying to go, here's where we are, here's where we go from here'" (Reina & Stewart, 2019, p. 14).

We assessed ourselves, made a plan, and mapped out the route. The Journey Plan had four key elements:

1. Create a common mission and vision for the school.

2. Develop and expect acceptable behaviors for successful collaboration.

3. Create a guaranteed and viable curriculum.

4. Develop a process for improving instruction. (Reina & Stewart, 2019)

(Continued)

<span style="color:red">Our Journey Plan</span>

1. **Create a common mission and vision for the school.** During the 2013–2014 school year, the school went through an extensive process to develop a mission and vision statement for the school that we could all agree on. This process was challenging. Many people resisted the change and rebelled. Ultimately, people had to choose to get on board and continue forward with the school or find another place.

   Luckily, many teachers understood the goal of having a mission and vision that we could believe in and that would move us forward. Those who were unwilling to get on board were clearly anchors pulling us down.

   When we got down to the mission and vision, it had these components. EBLS will
   - serve as a fully functioning elementary school,
   - take on the responsibility for teaching K–5 students using the most effective evidence-based practices,
   - serve as a model for preservice teachers who will be mentored by master teachers,
   - be actively engaged in conducting and disseminating research in the field of elementary education. (Reina, 2015)

2. **Develop and expect acceptable behaviors for successful collaboration**. Our second objective was to establish a common set of behavioral expectations for the faculty. We wanted to establish norms for working collaboratively and for how we would show respect for each other. While we knew that consensus was not always possible, we also knew that communication and cooperation were essential. Teachers needed to share with one another, be heard respectfully, and be open to constructive criticism. We realized that our professionalism, or lack of it, would impact student learning. These behaviors became norms for the school.

   Teachers were given the opportunity to improve behaviors and demonstrate their effectiveness to gain autonomy, which became an essential characteristic of school growth.

3. **Create a guaranteed and viable curriculum**. As a school that emphasizes using the most current educational research, we focused on using evidence-based practice in curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

We soon realized that to deliver the curriculum, we needed to ensure that our teachers took ownership of the standards. We were able to achieve this through an intensive curriculum development process. The curriculum told us *what* we needed to teach, but the *how* was in the work of the Journey Plan. We provided teachers with extensive curriculum development training. Our training began with the process of developing a guaranteed and viable curriculum and extended into creating scope and sequence maps and unpacking standards.

Meeting our goal of a quality curriculum in our Journey Plan wasn't a short process, but we knew that this was an essential step in the success of our school. It took a commitment of time, money, and administrative support to make this process a reality.

"The next step in the curriculum development process was to identify power standards for each content area. Power Standards are intended to serve as the 'most essential skills' for students to master before they exit each grade level. In identifying these standards, we were able to create a continuum of skills that would assure that all students were getting the most important information as they progressed through their learning" (Reina, 2015, p. 3).

4. **Develop a process for improving instruction.** Implementing a process for continually improving instruction was monumental. "Teachers completed the steps of an action research methodology where they were observing, reflecting, planning, and implementing change within their instruction. This process required teachers reflect on their instruction and to ensure that student learning was the focus of their work" (Reina, 2015, pp. 3–4). Teachers were required to

   - review multiple lessons throughout the year and reflect on the effectiveness of each lesson;
   - analyze the results to determine the impact of lesson design and instruction on student performance;
   - determine what needed to be changed, and address the changes;
   - throughout the process, show they were "more confident in their ability, and began to see the impact of master teachers' efforts reflected in the academic progress of our students" (Reina, 2015, p. 4).

*(Continued)*

(Continued)

As a result of implementing the Journey Plan, we started to see rich rewards for our efforts. The year after we received a D, we got a C, and then for the next two years the school received an A grade, showing continual growth in all areas.

In 2016, the school was awarded a National Blue Ribbon and named a top charter school in the state and nation. "Additionally, when analyzing the standardized state tests, we received 300 out of 300 possible academic-growth points indicating that our students had made significant gains" (Reina, 2015, p. 4).

"The hours of analysis, reflection, mapping, and professional development precipitated positive academic change for our students. They are learning at higher levels and absorbing content they did not even have access to before. Beyond the numbers, our school has strong morale and has become a community of learners. We all see a common and clear mission, and we have a vision for the endless potential of our school. Even though the first steps were terrifying, a persistent effort to bring about change has allowed us to create a school that our students and community deserve" (Reina, 2015, p. 4).

## Our Research and Experience Taught Us to Focus on Work

Our careers (Gaylan's and Betty's) span over thirty years, and we have researched the way people work. We have viewed work through the lens of the scientific movement to the human relations movement to the complexities of the present. We have observed, conducted, and participated in many great training and development programs.

We have also tried to figure out why so many training and development programs fail or provide little lasting value. Our observations have led us to conclude that learning organizations require a much more work-focused approach—practical, experiential, real-world applications of the work that needs to be done. Gaylan, along with Dr. Brent Peterson, developed a process called "The Work Itself," which was a response to those experiences. It became the heart of our research and validated our approach to new methods. From there, strategic planning became essential and culture expanded with every client engagement. The Work Itself remains the centerpiece of our work but is part of a more holistic process.

We have verified our approach and collected an immense amount of data. We had the assistance of Dr. Brent Peterson and reviewed the data from the many other organizations that have done similar studies (Harris, Harvard Business Review, FranklinCovey, Effectiveness Institute, Gallup, and dozens of consulting companies). We have worked with companies large and small, government agencies, nonprofits, schools, and community groups.

In every case, Fake Work kept cropping up as a serious foe of productivity and organizational results. Brent, for example, did impact studies on many training programs and found that, generally speaking, these programs help people but have little impact on the organization and its results. We believe many of those programs helped focus attention on human interaction, but not much that affected performance.

We have worked with organizations in continuous improvement efforts, developing and implementing strategies, aligning teams and individuals with the strategies, and assisting individuals to perform critical work tasks regarding the strategy. We have done measurement studies to analyze the true impact of this work on organizational results.

Simply put, we've done our homework (and we're happy to share our answers with you!).

School leaders who follow the strategies and Paths in this book will see their school cultures thrive, will experience a staff with a renewed sense of purpose, and will see growth in student success and well-being. Watch Video 1 to hear Gaylan and Betty talk about the growth they have seen in schools that have done the work.

## This Book Is Practical, Reflective, and Tool-Based

**Sections I and II** will help you identify and understand the primary causes of Fake Work. Chapters 1 through 5 are about problems and failings. The causes are symptoms of unhealthy organizations, and the Paths (in Section III) are procedures to get well. Everyone has experienced Fake Work, but we want to illuminate the key issues that multiply problems and compound them over time. These sections are the diagnostic work regarding organizational health.

**Section III** offers strategies for building a high-performance culture with the Paths to Real Work. These Paths mirror the Causes chapters. The intent is to take you through processes that will help you realize the potential of your organization.

In every case, Fake Work kept cropping up as a serious foe of productivity and organizational results.

Video 1: The Benefits of Doing Real Work

To read a QR code, you must have a smartphone or tablet with a camera. We recommend that you download a QR code reader app that is made specifically for your phone or tablet brand. You may also access all videos on the book's companion website.

**stopfakework ineducation.com**

The objectives of each Path are the same:

**Figure 0.3    The 5 Pillars That Support the Paths to Real Work**

1.  Build a high-performance culture.

2.  Prioritize strategic plans that focus on ambitious targets.

3.  Adhere to the process for Real Work: "The Work Itself."

4.  Embrace the "everyone a leader" type of leadership.

5.  Ensure that your work is renewable and sustainable.

The model is the architecture of those processes, and the underpinnings of all the Paths are critical pillars of the processes (see Figure 0.3). We elaborate on the underpinnings throughout the book and help you see how they integrate with the processes—the Paths to Real Work—as we work through them step by step.

**Figure 0.4    Fundamental Underpinnings of the Paths to Real Work**



**Fundamentals that underpin the Paths**

**The Pillars that endure and prop up the journey to Real Work.**
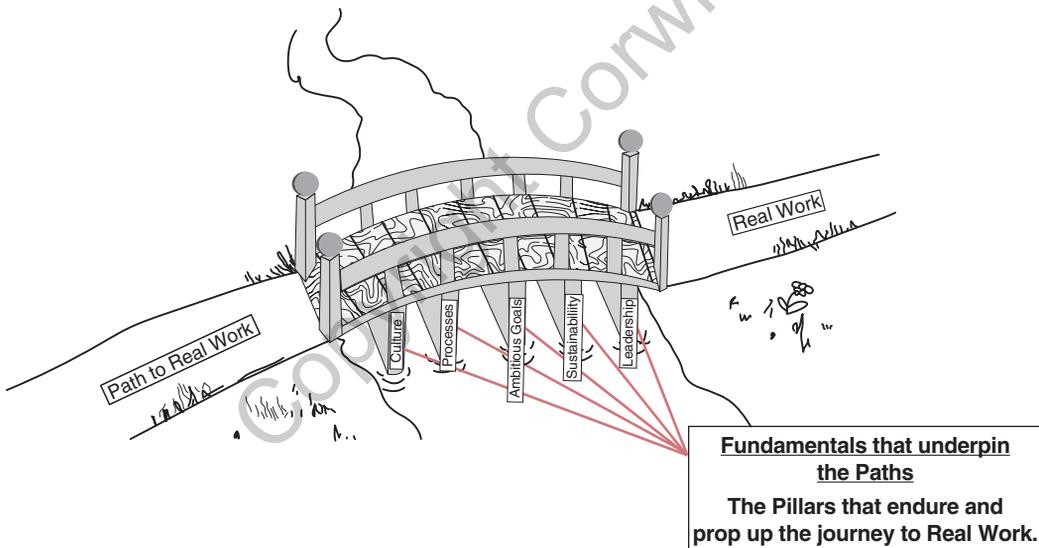
*Source:* Bridge image by Hannah Wilkinson.

Figure 0.4 represents the crucial values of these five fundamentals that are the pillars holding up the Paths to Real Work.

Every chapter in Section III contains processes, tools, and practical approaches for putting our ideas to work. However, the key is this: it's a process. That means it requires a step-by-step approach to establish a culture, develop strategies, align to those strategies, then execute them in daily tasks.

We know that school teams who take the time and make the commitment to journey through these Paths will see measurable results. Your

teams will work together better than at any other time in their past. This will lead to the greater likelihood of success for more students.

## Take Advantage of the Benefits of the Book

The book is filled with activities to keep you participating actively and investing as an organization:

1. **Exercises:** These ask you to reflect on your organization, your team, and your own work. We hope you will read actively. Be a part of the discussion and the solution.

2. **Tools:** You will find many tools in the book and online at **stopfakeworkineducation.com**. These tools are meant to help you establish practices, create habits with your teams, and guide you through key thinking to accomplish a task.

3. **Charts:** In several of the Paths, you will find references to charts and, in some cases, samples of completed charts that we use for The Work Itself sessions. They help facilitate open discussions and transparency in those sessions. These charts are available on the website as well.

4. **Assessments:** The book includes some mini-assessments, but you will also find an extremely comprehensive assessment online.

5. **Steps:** Throughout the chapters, you will find step-by-step processes to help you break down a larger set of tasks into bite-sized pieces. These processes may look daunting at first, but they are very practical and relatively easy to apply.

6. **Checklists:** You will find many checklists and tables that provide reminders of things to do and to note.

Our goal is to help you understand and apply proven practices that we know and use. Everything is meant to accommodate Real Work.

In addition to these benefits, readers also have access to the book's website, which will have even more resources to help you do the Real Work that needs to get done.

## The Book Comes From Our Converging Journeys From Diverse Roots to Common Paths

Our backgrounds are different in many ways, but have a lot of common roots. Right now, we see ourselves as change agents—hoping to improve, in any way, the lives of the educators we need, care about, and admire. We aren't naïve. We don't treat the issues simply or the stories

We have a proven process that has provided extraordinary value to many organizations— including many schools. Our process can help school districts and individual schools rethink, rebuild, and thrive.

without careful consideration. We want to understand the details and how they apply to bigger questions.

We know you need a level of courage to take this on. The system is built to resist change and maintain status quo. But we are optimists and dreamers. We believe that choosing a better way to work can make a significant change in your lives and in the organizations you serve and, most importantly, make significant impact on outcomes for students.

We come from rural backgrounds and families with a strong work ethic and big consequences for work not getting done—and done right. Work was linked to how people survive and thrive.

Without the planting, raising, and bailing of the hay, cows don't eat, and they don't give milk. Both of us still manage sizable gardens that keep us humble about all growth and the connections to things that matter.

**Gaylan,** an educator and consultant, writer and playwright, has been an uncomfortable intruder in the business world for over thirty years. He has loved the work—mostly in a role with educators and as an educator. And he has loved the learning demanded from the endless challenges grown of his ignorance.

The sheer volume of client experiences across America and in Europe, Africa, and Asia has taught him a thousand lessons about the need for people to do Real Work. He has grown more and more passionate about helping people align their work to strategic intent and to see the joy of doing work with clear intention that drives real results. While he has been involved in the work in this book for close to twenty-five years, in the last ten years, much of his work has concentrated in schools and he only wishes that had become a focus earlier because he loves working with educators. Gaylan co-authored a book about Fake Work several years ago, and he feels it did not go far enough and didn't focus on the specific needs of educators.

**Betty** has been an educator at every level: teacher, principal, director, and deputy superintendent. She has lived the world of public education for most of her life and knows this world very well. Although her career pathway led her to many districts, both rural and urban, and a position with a statewide organization, it was not by strategic design, but rather living life.

Having experienced a plethora of Fake Work throughout her career, she gained insights that led her to become a keen student of strategy and its impact on school culture. Now from the outside as a consultant, facilitator, and coach, she has been able to create some objective criteria for

how to attack Fake Work for teachers, administrators, and governance boards. Betty has been told she's unrelenting in her approach to education, but it's always been her passion for student success that has caused her to nudge others until it's done right.

Gaylan and Betty have been involved in this work together for over ten years and have developed a common view and have a common appreciation of both the problems and the solutions. We started working together when Gaylan, as a consultant, worked with San Antonio Independent School District, where Betty was a deputy superintendent. Betty and Gaylan, along with Dr. Duron, began to apply the processes used in this book from beginning to end. Betty became a certified facilitator and later, as a consultant on her own as well as with Gaylan, worked to provide these processes to many school districts.

We especially appreciate our clients because their willingness to trust us and go on what might seem to be a perilous journey with us is bold and heartwarming. And our clients' contributions are immeasurable. We often tell our clients that we learn more than we give. What we learn from smart, insightful, hardworking, dedicated people is way beyond the gift of learning—it is a gift of humanity.

Learn more about Gaylan and Betty by viewing Video 2.
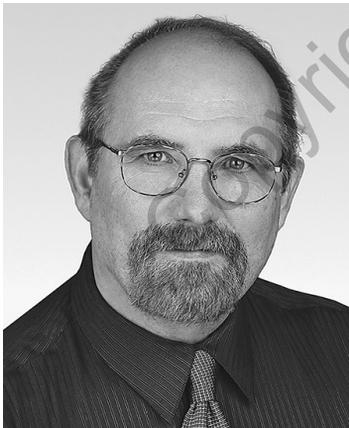






Video 2: Introducing Authors Gaylan Nielson and Betty Burks

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